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TAMING THE WILD:  
ON WOMANHOOD, NATION AND NATURE IN THE ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S  
*FALL ON YOUR KNEES* AND *THE WAY THE CROW FLIES*

By

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Bachelor of Arts in English, University of Saint Mary, Leavenworth, KS, 1997

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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Taming the Wild: On Womanhood, Nation and Nature in the Ann-Marie Macdonald's

*Fall on Your Knees* and *The Way the Crow Flies*

Chairperson: Dr. Eric Reimer

Co-Chairperson: Dr. David Moore

Co-Chairperson: Dr. Ann Wright

This project evaluates the work of Canadian author and playwright Ann-Marie Macdonald in the context of links between ecocritical, feminist and post-colonial perspectives; it seeks to understand how broader definitions for gender provide an alternative to the patriarchal binaries that limit both individual and national identities. Part of the Canadian conscious is an anxiety that questions not only the way difference impacts their culture, but also how these differences speak to a lack of a homogenized national identity. This study focuses on Macdonald's novels *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) and *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) , in order to examine histories that have traditionally been excluded, stories outside of colonial, and later, national rhetoric. Macdonald exhumes these stories, elevating women's voices, in particular, to reveal the danger of limiting visions of personal identity. These identities, particularly national identities, implicitly reflect deeply imbedded, and often disregarded, relationships with our natural environment. Thus, national and individual identities are inseparable from ecological concerns. *Fall on Your Knees* uses the image and context of gardens as a means of discovery, particularly in imaging the history of colonial settlement. *The Way the Crow Flies* continues this work to explore the impact of modernity and the continued policies of categorization and, subsequently, subjugation. Modern visions for land development and industrialization inform perspectives about place and selfhood as landscapes experienced a form of colonization that revised definitions for natural and unnatural spaces. These definitions are similar to those for male and female, which have traditionally place the latter in a subjugate position. The inscription of femininity parallels that of the land, its traumas providing an important collusion between land and people. It is this paper's contention that Macdonald uses her stories to destabilize male/female binaries and, ultimately, suggest an alternative to restrictive identities.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following people:  
my mother, who never allowed me to quit, even when I cried and whined incessantly; my children, whose lives will be forever shaped by the countless hours spent on university campuses and in busy coffee shops; my friends, who listened to all my complaints with an empathetic ear, and to myself, for being brave enough to try.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TAMING THE WILD:

ON WOMANHOOD, NATION AND NATURE IN ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S *FALL*

*ON YOUR KNEES* AND *THE WAY THE CROW FLIES*

*Let us suppose then that Woman is Nature, or Nature is a woman. Obviously the kinds of female figures that can be imagined will then depend on what kind of place you live in – a desert is not the same as a jungle – and also on what you think of the kind of place you live in.* (Atwood 238)

Canadian literature is acutely aware of the tension between expectation and reality; nature fails time and again to meet expectations. Connections between nature and womanhood further confuse the relationship, for though “Nature as woman keeps surfacing as a metaphor all over Canadian literature” she is an “old, cold, forbidding and possibly vicious one” (Atwood 238). Linking women to nature has been the project of ecofeminist discourse. William Rueckert, an ecocritic, states that Margaret Atwood’s book *Surfacing* shows that there is a “demonstrable relationship between the ways in which men treat and destroy women and the ways in which men treat and destroy nature” (Rueckert 117). Frequently, ecocritical theory is linked to post-colonial and/or feminist perspectives, having shared notions of subjugation. What these three fields share is a similar motivation to liberate a subjugated Other. As Simon Estok argues: “Ecocriticism that does not look at the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of the natural environment quite simply fails in its mandate to ‘make connections’ and is quite simply *not* ecocriticism” (200). Estok emphasizes this connection, contending that

ASLE<sup>1</sup> embraces “inclusivity” and “seeks all possible connections, as does ecocriticism, so much so, in fact, that it is sometimes difficult to tell where ecocriticism ends and nature studies begins” (198). Estok asserts that the significance of eco-criticism lies in a commitment to view the natural world as an important entity, not an object of study. It is a commitment to making connections between the human and natural world.

Ann-Marie Macdonald approaches the complex relationship between humankind, nature, and national identity through narratives that strip the comfortable tomes of patriarchal histories to reveal women’s stories of survival. Inspired by a consideration of early North American settlement, Ann Marie Macdonald’s novel *Fall on Your Knees* explores the connections between humanity and nature, expressly through identity development as restricted by patriarchy. The assault of societal perceptions, those perceptions brought to the reading concerning gender, nation, and nature, threads throughout her work and plays a crucial role in exploring the space between binary oppositions. Macdonald’s stories offer competing notions of gender and nation that become resources for dramatic action and encourage audiences to question dominant social narratives for history, particularly familial histories. Her second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*, thematically parallels *Fall on Your Knees* with its vigorous consideration of gender and nation. If *Fall on Your Knees* serves as a cautionary tale warning readers about the danger of singular definitions for identity and citizenry, then *The Way the Crow Flies* reveals the failure to accommodate diversity. Both novels provide striking descriptions of landscape, as well as didactic commentary, to suggest that exploitation of land corresponds to

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<sup>1</sup> The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment

that of women. Juxtaposed to the image of a peaceful camaraderie based on pluralism, Macdonald writes, "The birds saw the murder" (2). If the settlers brought the pastoral narrative for pristine nature, if wilderness offers what Greg Garrard describes as, "promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth," Macdonald challenges this promise in revealing the traumas that have been hidden behind the patriarchal grasp. Macdonald interrogates history with her murder-mystery-like story to elevate women's (and nature's) traumas as equal to men's. Macdonald destabilizes the binaries for natural versus unnatural spaces, not only in writing against established social histories, but also in demanding broader definitions for gender and identity.

Ann-Marie Macdonald's 1996 novel *Fall on Your Knees* considers the relationships between colonial settlements and the land through the Piper family's experience in Nova Scotia, Canada. *Fall on Your Knees* represents her most well-known work in the United States, due in part to being featured by Oprah Winfrey; however, Macdonald's work in Canada extends well beyond this novel, ranging from film to television acting as well as the theatre and an additional novel. Macdonald's personal career, like the work of her novels, defies easy categorization. Born in 1959 on a Canadian Air Force base in West Germany, Macdonald has earned awards as a movie actress, playwright, television actress, and novelist. A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada, Macdonald's film work includes: *Island Love Song* (CBC, 1987), *I Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987), *Where the Spirit Lives* (CBC-TV, 1990, Gemini Award), and *Better Than Chocolate* (1999). Like her novels, her film work focuses on expanding definitions of gender, specifically



advocating for recognition of lesbian relationships. Her movies follow coming-of-age stories throughout which female leads struggle to admit and understand their same-sex desire. Her heroines must find the inner strength to defy dominant societal codes that define gender and relationships, and to some degree Canadian citizenry. For example, *Better Than Chocolate's* overt story of a young woman's efforts to become comfortable with her sexuality parallels a sub-theme of political unrest as the city tries to find space for difference.

Macdonald's stage career, recognized worldwide, shows a similar interest in exploring society's limited definitions for womanhood. She has written two plays, *The Arab's Mouth* (republished as *Belle Morale*) and *Goodnight Juliet, Good Morning Desdemona*. She earned a Dora nomination in 1995, and the Chalmers Canadian Play Award, The Governor General's Award and the Canadian Author's Association Award all in 1990. *Goodnight Juliet, Good Morning Desdemona* has toured Canada and been staged over fifty times worldwide. Both plays explore female characters through the eyes of a heroine working to find strength in a society where she has little power. Although neither character challenges sexual codes, both discover female mentors who provide guidance and reassurance that allows them to determine their own personal course without fear of reprimand.

The first of her two novels, *Fall on Your Knees*, earned her the Giller Prize and the Commonwealth Writers Best First Book Prize in 1997.<sup>2</sup> Set in Nova Scotia along the hard Canadian coastline, Macdonald writes against the traditionally accepted themes of homogenized difference to illuminate not only the difficulty of settlement, but also the clash between diverse cultures and the toxic prejudices that

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<sup>2</sup> Nemiroff, Greta Hoffman. "Ann-Marie Macdonald." *Cambridge University Press* (1999).

lead to human violence. The overwhelming theme of this novel provides perspective concerning the development of Canadian nationality, particularly in light of how national development depended on the subordination of marginalized peoples. *Fall on Your Knees* explores the rhetoric of Enlightenment philosophy in connection with ecological issues to understand how difference became essential to constructing the hierarchies that molded relationships between people and the environment. The novel aggressively demands that readers ask, “What difference does difference make?”

Subversion of heterogeneous cultural assumptions plays an important role in her 2003 novel *The Way the Crow Flies* as well. Lothar Hönnighausen writes in a review of *The Way the Crow Flies*,

[Macdonald’s] greatest achievement matching the rich postmodern Victorianism of *Fall on Your Knees*, lies in intertwining two apparently very dissimilar subject[s] [to provide] a revisionist historical picture of the 1960s and its reaction, the artistic and lesbian counterculture of the 1990s—with a very personal narrative of abuse and its consequences.  
(150)

Her novels “question the sincerity of Canadian beliefs about diversity and multiculturalism” (Nurse 38). In *The Way the Crow Flies*, Macdonald’s “questioning” shifts between social and political concerns from post-WWII politics and the ethics behind acquisition of scientific knowledge, to the development and tension of the Nuclear Arms Race, to religious and cultural clash as found on military installations, and eventually turning to the 1960s lesbian counterculture. The story balances

traditionally masculine themes of warfare and weaponry with women's stories of survival. Keyir Kelly quotes Macdonald as indicating that "The girls in *The Way the Crow Flies* are veterans, like their fathers. It's a war story" (54). Understanding the text as a war story means recognizing the struggle to establish identity as a battle. Macdonald's characters interact in a variety of hostile and friendly environments, each of which plays a significant role in determining their future identity. Included are the traumas, the miscarriages of justice, the words unspoken, and the events and actions misunderstood. Not unlike her previous novel, the focus of the work exhumes the haunted repressions resulting from trauma.

*The Way the Crow Flies* provides a glimpse into the McCarthy family, a family deeply dependent upon a Canadian identity as reflected by their affiliation with the Canadian Air Force, at the same time demonstrating the clear lack of solid national standing as Jack McCarthy becomes entangled in Cold War espionage. Adjacent to the McCarthy story, Macdonald writes an interpretation of the famous 1959 Lynne Harper murder. The murder scene, always depicted as part of the "natural" wilderness, interrupts the text and emphasizes the emotional conditions of her characters. It follows that traumatic events become a part of the landscape, buried into its memory. Unlike her previous novel, *The Way the Crow Flies* lacks scholarly conversation. Reviews of the work concentrate on its theme of abuse, and by and large miss its greater message connecting the abuse to environmental exploitation. The novel demands that readers rigorously question the consequences of polluting natural spaces, the consequences of inscribing trauma into the landscape. It demands that readers consider how women survive trauma and specifically how

Canadian identity has come to depend upon the silencing of women and the silence of nature. In this novel she asks, "Can we recover from difference?"

Macdonald's efforts to provide broader definitions for identity connect her work to nature. Just as biodiversity assures survival of an ecosystem, so might pluralism assures the survival of humanity. Frequently, however, Macdonald's work reveals uneasy negotiation, the violence between peoples trying to discover compromise and acceptance. Furthermore, Western society has long pursued narrowly focused policies that consistently eliminate uniqueness in favor of resources. We live in a world where we "live by the word, and by the power of the word, but are increasingly powerless to act upon the world. Real power in our time is political, economic, and technological; real knowledge is increasingly scientific" (Rueckert 115). Modernity, therefore, gets lost in a drive for survival, that while linked to the environment, is lost in an anxious detachment induced by colonization and industrialization.

*The Way the Crow Flies* hints at trauma inflicted by the desire for land and resources through Métis characters lost in social institutions that severed their attachment to their history and people. The pale of modernity is this loss of connection, the inability to comprehend or create the bonds necessary to forge genuine relationships and consequently survive. Instead, as Macdonald's work demonstrates, societies toil to "re-create" Eden, while simultaneously destroying that which they seek, burying the disgracing trauma inflicted on the Earth that terminally haunts them. The Garden of Eden represents so much more than Biblical allusion—Eden epitomizes the Western world's relationship between humans and nature; the

point at which the serpent and his brethren became forever envisioned as untrustworthy and subordinate. It represents the break between male and female, the story told as a means of subjugating females, shaming them for having removed humanity from God's favor. It even indirectly hints at colonialist perspectives as Adam and Eve represent those who cultivate and tame, who discover and "conquer" Eden. The Fall of Man not only engages the work of feminist theory, but also Western World's depiction of nature. A conflicting message of trust versus mistrust follows a scene replete with images of lush opulence lost through the devious efforts of an animal.

These histories and relationships are crucial to understanding Macdonald's work, particularly those histories significant to the development of the Americas. Though the United States, Canada, and Mexico share a similar colonial past, each has determined a distinct future. Canada has traditionally been subsumed under the umbrella of the United States and struggled to define itself culturally. Canadian scholar and author Margaret Atwood states, "If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia."<sup>3</sup> This schizophrenia has itself manifested as an obsession with the perceived notion that Canadians lack a particular identity as well as an anxious relationship with liberal government policies that appear to encourage and support difference. Furthermore, rather than breaking colonial ties with the British Empire, Canada maintained its link as part of the Commonwealth, complicating its current struggle to assert a particular identity. Canada is in fact obsessed with this lack of identity. Canada has become what Marshall McLuhan sees as the "only country in the world that knows how to live

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<sup>3</sup> Atwood, Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 62.

without an identity.”<sup>4</sup> This perceived lack has led Professor Edward Grabb to contend that one of the reasons Canadians are able to accommodate diversity is due to their “relatively weak national identity.” Contrarily, French Canadians have a much clearer understanding of “who they are as a people, and in this way, are much more like Americans in their nationalism and patriotic fervour.”<sup>5</sup> The “schizophrenia” of Canada speaks not only to the diasporas that helped create the nation, but also to the multiple political ties that have prevented significant growth.

Scholars and writers alike seem constantly confounded in their efforts to define Canadian identity. *Survival: A Thematic Guide To Canadian Literature* is Margaret Atwood’s case for a definitive Canadian literary canon based on recurrent themes singular to the Canadian experience. Atwood argues that specific themes persist throughout Canadian literature, with one of the most important perhaps being survival. Survival seems to depend upon the successful “taming” of the wilderness that was and still is the Canadian landscape. Colonial intervention responded to a “threefold calling” that asked for the “wise use of its resources”, “universal betterment” for humanity, and aid for the indigenous people who needed “protection from their own ignorance and violence.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, survival and nature share a complex relationship. Atwood argues that Canadian literature reflects distrust; Canadian writers “as a whole do not trust Nature, they are always suspecting some dirty trick” (59). According to Atwood, this apprehension originates from the expectations brought from England that had defined humankind’s relationship to

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<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, Marshall. “Culture and National Identity.” *The Fraser Institute*.  
<http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html> February 19, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> “Culture and National Identity” p. 129.

<sup>6</sup> Spurr, David. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993, 34.

land, particularly the sublime and picturesque modes of Romanticism. Either one was in awe of the grandeur, or looking for guidance from a mother figure. This mode of perception viewed authentic nature as good and urban as bad. Even after the appearance of Darwinism, the colonies stayed relatively married to this view of nature. Colonial discourse “naturalized” the process of domination through both an ideology bolstered by moral philosophies “calling for the conquest of nature” and the scientific theories that viewed the “colonizing process as a counterpart, in the development of human society, to natural evolution” (Spurr 161).

The first chapter of this work explores this notion of “naturalized domination” through Macdonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*. Literary tropes associated with garden, wilderness and the assault of societal perceptions, play a crucial role in explicating the space between binary oppositions. The perceptions brought to the reading concerning the terms identity and nature underscore Macdonald’s greater effort to understand how limited definitions stymie humanity’s growth. The novel forces audiences to reexamine seminal presentations of national development by challenging traditional notions of homogenized difference. *Fall on Your Knees* attempts to untangle the complex genesis of toxic prejudices that lead to human violence, focusing on the disease of man’s violence as enacted both upon land and women and the ways both are forced to incorporate such loss in order to survive. Survival depends upon recognizing the pollution and exploitation, of both human and natural spaces. Ultimately survival depends upon appreciating and accepting multiplicity as part of human-nature space relationships, a biodiversity defined in terms of multiplicity of desire. Thus, Macdonald writes to “unearth” the poison of

repression, and in doing so, not only provides a glimpse into the reality of national development, but also the inadequacy of patriarchy. In linking patriarchal modalities to the Earth through gendered spaces, particularly gardens, Macdonald demonstrates not only the ways in which feminine spaces become dominated, but also natural spaces as well. Feminizing landscapes and linking them to feminine space, such as wombs, offers further engagement of such themes and, again, further evidence for an argument that connects gender and ecology. Nature, therefore, though not exclusively the property of females, certainly becomes feminized to the point of becoming nearly defined by such an association. However, Macdonald's novel ultimately destabilizes man/woman binaries, and instead offers multiplicity of desire in answer to patriarchal dominance that holds both land and women in subservience.

The second chapter examines *The Way the Crow Flies*, continuing an exploration of Canadian national development as analogous to and subversive of notions of egalitarian difference. Comparing ideas about wilderness to such accompanying actions as taming, controlling, or conquering, this chapter demonstrates a significant link between nature and women as each experiences "taming." Simultaneously, Canadian politics represents a post-colonial ideology that reflects and refracts a sense of mediation as well as a desire to establish a modicum of sanctity in global politics. This desire translates into a demand for nuclear technology and involvement in geopolitical Cold War battles. If the cognitive dissonance of the first section examines the direct link between humans and nature, the second pushes to discover where Enlightenment philosophy has taken humanity.



*The Way the Crow Flies* moves beyond cautionary exploration to examine the effects of competing binary tensions created by normative definitions of what it means to be a man and a woman. Fundamentally, Macdonald's work demands that readers "question the sincerity of Canadian beliefs about diversity and multiculturalism" (Nurse 39), a belief connected to one of the ways Canadians define themselves as a nation. In addition to interrogating individual identity, Macdonald's novel explores the complexities of "Canadian-ness." Macdonald destabilizes the dichotomy of natural/unnatural spaces by creating an unnatural scene in a metaphorically authentic natural space. Her descriptions of landscape written against a subtext of environmentalism consider competing images of wildness versus controlled/constructed spaces, a reflection of the characters' individual struggles with dichotomous identity. Above all, Macdonald's work disputes binary absolutism. The pluralism of her characters, scenes and plot in conjunction with her complex, layered text argue for a world view that denies bifurcated categorization.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### 'THE CONSOLATION OF ROCKS': UNEARTHING THE PAST IN ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S *FALL ON YOUR KNEES*

*Put a shell to your ear. You can hear the Mediterranean. Open the hope chest. You can smell the Old Country.* (Macdonald 89)

*Diaspora: The Dispersion; i.e. (among the Hellenistic Jews) the whole body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Captivity (John vii. 35); (among the early Jewish Christians) the body of Jewish Christians outside of Palestine.*<sup>7</sup>

Ann-Marie Macdonald's first novel, *Fall on Your Knees* follows the Piper family's maturity to reveal not only the tangible realities of colonial settlement, but also the potential for conflict within diasporic communities, those communities built from the Canadian policy of "vertical mosaic,"<sup>8</sup> a medley of names and peoples: "McVey, McCurdy, Ross, Rhodes and Curry; Moore, McKenzie, MacLeod, Mahmoud; MacEchan, Vitelli, Boutillier, O'Leary, MacGilvary, Ferguson, Jacobson, Smith; MacDonald, McDonald, [and] Macdonnell" (Macdonald 17). The significance of *Fall on Your Knees* lies in characters struggling to define not just their individual identities, but also their identities as members of families and communities. Their struggles reflect Canada's efforts to define its status as a nation in light of its continued membership in the English Imperial Commonwealth as well as the neighbor to a highly influential neighbor, the United States. The novel attempts to

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<sup>7</sup>"diaspora". *Oxford English Dictionary*. Web. Feb. 20, 2010.  
[http://dictionary.oed.com.weblib.lib.umd.edu:8080/cgi/entry/50063322?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=diaspora&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=20](http://dictionary.oed.com.weblib.lib.umd.edu:8080/cgi/entry/50063322?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=diaspora&first=1&max_to_show=20).

<sup>8</sup> Ferguson, Langlois, and Roberts write that "Until the 1970s, Canada's 'vertical mosaic' meant that immigrants entered a segmented and hierarchical political, social, and economic order. Canadian policy was to recruit immigrants, but Canadian practice was to ensure ethnic, racial, and religious segmentation. With the exception of elite representatives of ethnic groups and members of the most-preferred peoples, immigrants experienced either ambivalent or hostile receptions" (75).

untangle the complex genesis of toxic prejudices that lead to human violence, focusing on the disease of man's violence as enacted both upon land and women and the ways both are forced to incorporate such loss in order to survive. Survival depends upon recognizing the pollution, recognizing the exploitation, of both human and natural spaces. Ultimately survival depends upon appreciating and accepting diversity as part of human-nature spatial relationships, a biodiversity defined by Macdonald as being inclusive of multiple expressions of desire.

*Fall on Your Knees* places readers in a small mining town off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada, "near cutaway cliffs that curve over narrow rock beaches below, where the silver sea rolls and rolls, flattering the moon" (9). Yet, introductory passages of natural beauty are illusory:

But tonight the surface of the creek is merely as Nature made it. And certainly it's odd but not at all supernatural to see the surface break, and a real live soaked and shivering girl rise up from the water and stare straight at us (11).

Macdonald's novel, in fact, focuses on repression: the image of the sister who mysteriously died rising from the water, the photo of the sister no longer discussed, or the cedar chest that smells of the Old World buried in the attic. She focuses on the words not said, the pictures not seen, what is hidden, haunted, buried, in order to subvert formulaic identity and patriarchal modalities. Simultaneously, Macdonald writes the earth as secret-keeper, a silent accomplice. The earth absorbs our repressions. The garden hides our past. The water washes away our sins. In burying our secrets, we poison not only the earth, but our society, our nation. Thus,

Macdonald writes to “unearth” the poison of repression, providing a glimpse into the reality of national development, and subsequently the inadequacy of the patriarchal binaries that subjugate woman and land. Writing the Earth as gendered space, particularly gardens, Macdonald demonstrates not only the ways in which feminine spaces become dominated, but also “natural” spaces as well. Landscapes linked to feminine space, specifically wombs, elucidate connections between gender and ecology as well as the relationship between men and women. Nature, though not exclusively the property of females, certainly becomes feminized to the point of becoming nearly defined by such an association. Survival, according to Macdonald, will depend on reconnection between people and the land as well as realizing broader definitions for desire and gender, to include space for lesbianism, transgender, and miscegenation. Macdonald’s novel ultimately destabilizes man/woman binaries, and instead offers multiplicity of desire in answer to patriarchal dominance that holds both land and women in subservience.

Arguably, a connection between humans and their environment lies imbedded in the word nature, yet how this interaction has manifested throughout literary tradition reads more antagonistically than “natural”. One need only think of the Old Testament story exemplifying human-nature interaction: the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. From this transgressive relationship, humans have consistently sought communion with nature as if in apology for having broken their covenant. Such motivation led explorers to leave Europe for the New World looking for new possibilities, new resources, and most importantly, another chance with God. Exploration promised economic, political and religious freedom, but early settlers

also yearned for “paradise” (Kolondy 171). However, far from bountiful cornucopian-images of abundance, the Canadian colonial experience focused on survival.

According to Margaret Atwood, the “central symbol for Canada- and this is based on numerous instances of its occurrence in both English and French Canadian literature- is undoubtedly Survival- *la Survivance*” (41).

Atwood contends that one of the unique aspects of Canadian colonial experience was survival. Contrary to the United States’ metaphors of the self-made man or the ‘City Upon a Hill’, one of the key metaphors for Canada has been the will to live in spite of harsh conditions. Coastal settlements were difficult to maintain due to cold weather, impossible winds, and rocky shores. Growing seasons were short, and the ground was not productive. Outposts were spread across thousands of miles, and settlers faced loneliness in addition to falling prey to a variety of threats. Thus the “repression” to which Macdonald eludes, though far from a uniquely Canadian experience, becomes contextually Canadian as it focuses on survival in spite of traumatic events. *Fall on Your Knees* challenges the colonists’ attempts to reconnect with God or paradise, and examines the patriarchal modality that would bury the truths of a world built on a patriarchal myopia privileging the select.

Burying these truths becomes a project for the “imperial administrative penetration.” The “‘identities’ imagined by the (confusedly) classifying mind of the colonial state, still awaited a reification” (Anderson 165). Benedict Anderson argues that imperial nations removed difference in favor of the homogenized term ‘Other’, and expressed intolerance for difference. According to Anderson, the term ‘nation’ is defined as an “imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited

and sovereign" (6), an intrinsically politically motivated community based on "imagined" participation. This concept of nation is significant to understanding the communities in *Fall on Your Knees*. James Piper's family comes from Irish-Scots descent. His wife, Maria Mahmoud's family is Lebanese. They have neighbors who are Jewish, and James works the mines with men from the West Indies. Canada as a nation cannot be defined as anything other than an "imagined" community, as its diversity could not have inspired a particular homogenized identity. However, the "imagined" community maintained a tight link to the British Empire. Thus Canadian identity is tied inextricably to yet another "imagined" community: England, the Mother Country.

James Piper represents the European Old World, despite the complex connotations this comparison engages. Though James holds onto bits and pieces of his Gaelic ancestry, he looks to England for guidance, for culture, for civilization. He sends to England for books. He trains his daughter in the canonized methods of classical Europe in dress, manners, speech, and above all, her voice training. James would have been considered inferior had his family remained in Europe a descendant of Gaelic ancestry, yet he re-enacts this type of patriarchal modality with his wife and children. While the space in between James and England is vast, he attempts to reduce its length through his fetishization of English books and civilization and reifying the patriarchal code. He knew that his mother's Bible, her Shakespeare, *Pilgrim's Progress* and Sir Walter Scott were not enough to "cultivate a gentleman. [...] Books were not an expense; they were an investment" (Macdonald 28). For James, connection to England through books will help construct his

presence and validate a more privileged identity. The painful reality, however, haunts the Piper home and landscape.

Macdonald ends her first chapter with suggestion of this specific affliction for James and his wife, Materia: "James and Materia moved into their big two-story white frame house, with attic, a month later. But just because it was new, doesn't mean it wasn't haunted" (25). Thus, early in the novel readers discover the ground beneath the Piper home is poisoned with secrets, curses, unnatural desire- in short, pollution. Gabriella Parro writes

This always already haunted house represents a site of repression and generational trauma in the Piper family. The familiar domestic space contains the potential for the uncanny, where what is repressed can be at home. (180)

Parro views the dark spaces within the home, as well as the harsh environment of the Canadian landscape as reminiscent of the gothic genre. The Piper home has a natural atmosphere of fear. James wants his language and customs followed, and Materia wants to speak Lebanese and return to her family's traditions. He eschews her religion as "Roman hocus-pocus"<sup>9</sup> and the first time he steps into a Catholic church he imagines it "smells like a whorehouse" (Macdonald 23), despite the fact that he is forced to convert to satisfy Materia's father, and cannot prevent Materia from submerging her five-year-old daughter's head into her bathwater because "In an emergency, any Catholic can baptize a child" (Macdonald 47). Furthermore, their family and physical space must mature from toxic beginnings to try to form some kind of hybrid identity negotiating not only the pitfalls of those transgressions

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<sup>9</sup> Macdonald 38.

brought from the past, but also those inherent in the mixing of two cultures. For Materia this means a reduction of space and a subsequent burial of her identity.

Metaphorically, Materia becomes buried in her cedar chest. James constructs a hope chest for Materia, remembering his own mother:

He built her a hope chest out of cedar. He waited for her to start sewing and knitting things—his mother had milled her own wool, spun, woven and sewn, a different song for every task, till wee Jams had come to see the tweeds and tartans as musical notation. But the hope chest remained empty. Rather than make Materia feel badly about it, James put it in the otherwise empty attic. (27)

In this passage, James very directly describes his idealized wife; an independent and industrious woman, able to use her creativity to produce items of value. Like James, Materia views the hope chest as connecting her to the past as well,

she kept it empty on purpose, so that nothing could come between her and the magical smell that beckoned her into memory. Cedar. She hung her head into the empty chest and allowed its gentle breath to lift and bear her away [...] baked earth and irrigated olive groves; the rippling veil of the Mediterranean, her grandfather's silk farm; the dark elixir of her language, her mother's hands stuck with parsley and cinnamon, her mother's hands stroking her forehead, braiding her hair [...] her mother's hands. The smell of the hope chest. The Cedars of Lebanon. (32)



The smell of cedar evokes a very real reunion with the Old Country, its smell bringing Materia back to the gardens of Lebanon, back to the garden of the Mahmoud family, back to the warmth and nurturing hands of her mother, at the same time showcasing the stunting of her growth resulting from her early marriage. A similar statement may be made concerning James' reminiscence. He too loses his mother, his home, and his metaphorical and physical "garden" early, and must develop without guidance.

These passages demonstrate the disparity between the couple's perspectives and values. James desires an industrious wife, an allusion to monetary value, and that Materia should be like his own mother. His ideology "discover[s] grounds on which to argue that the modern household [...] provided the proto-institutional setting where government through relentless supervision [...] appeared in its most benevolent guise" (Armstrong 572). The family trope helped the social function of national bureaucracy as the "image of the family was projected onto these nationalisms as their shadowy, naturalized forms" (McClintock 91). James' home is a model for patriarchal modalities, particularly as they become institutionalized into systemic bureaucracies espousing nationalist dogma. The cedar chest is his way of inscribing his manner of femininity, his identity for her. Materia, on the other hand, values people, her family, her home, all of which is embodied by the cedar smell of the empty chest. For her the hope chest is not empty, but full of an unrealized identity and memories of her past. The hope chest links Materia with land, and subsequently shows James' domination of both feminine and natural spaces.

James' disposition develops as a result of his mother's fear that she would lose her only son to the mines. Thus, to combat such a future, she instructs him in classical piano and literature, as well as imparts an expectation of ambition and early on readers understand that James desires money for a fine house, ready-made sundries, a wife idle enough to bare soft hands, and the company of music and books. Indirectly, James' mother imparts a lesson that he will never forget: knowledge will bring him power. Separation between humanity and nature, a sustained notion in Christian teachings, is further advanced by humanism and the scientific revolution which reduced nature to basic perfunctory systems and argued "reason [is] the means to achieving total mastery over nature" (Garra 62). The mines that produced "fire-bright clouds billowing out of the stacks of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company [...] cast an amber spice upon the sky that hung, then silted down in saffron arcs to swell, distend and disappear in a falling raiment of finest ash,"<sup>10</sup> provide proof of humanity's successful mastery. James' mother's choices also separated him from his community, a complex *mélange* of peoples that at first came from the "all over the Maritimes, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales"<sup>11</sup> and later from the West Indies and Africa. James' mother separates him from his community; he will not be like the rest of his Canadian neighbors and be claimed by the mines. James rejects manual employment; he rejects that which would taint his personal, ideal landscape, instead favoring a misplaced anachronistic connection to the British Empire.

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<sup>10</sup> Macdonald 16.

<sup>11</sup> Macdonald 43.

The anachronistic connection James maintains throughout his lifetime plays an essential role in dividing his world, as well as the novel, into compartments based on the levels at which they perform, or at times conform, to the standard. For example, one of the first and most important moments readers experience such a division results from the presentation of the Mahmoud family's canonical landscape. Materia Mahmoud's garden boasts a piano "centerpiece in a big front room full of plump sofas, gold-embroidered chairs, florid carpets and dainty-legged end tables with marble tops" (18). Her family's successful settlement may be marked not only by the opulence in their home, but also by the employment of servants: "Mrs. Mahmoud greeted James with *Bliadhana Mhath Ūr*<sup>12</sup> but didn't show him into the front room, remaining in the kitchen to work alongside the hired Irish girl, who had a lot to learn" (19). Just as James describes his world as being divided into binary oppositions, so too does Mr. Mahmoud, who, like James, maintains a connection to the Old World- Lebanon. However, only Mr. Mahmoud enjoys this connection. Mrs. Mahmoud "never spoke of her homeland" (19).

This same kind of power/domination rubric becomes the focus of Annette Kolondy's work. Kolondy argues that one of man's oldest cherished fantasies is reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction. (171)

Colonization of North America represents that ideal return:

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<sup>12</sup> Gaelic translation: 'Good New Year'

Eden, Paradise, the Golden Age, and the idyllic garden, in short all the backdrops for European literary pastoral, were subsumed in the image of an America promising material ease without labor or hardship, as opposed to the grinding poverty of previous European existence [...] all this possible because, at the deepest psychological level, the move to America was experienced as the daily reality of what has become its single dominating metaphor: regression from the cares of adult life and a return to the primal warmth of womb or breast in feminine landscape. (173)

Though Kolondy's statement speaks of United States settlement, Canadian settlement began almost simultaneously. National identity, however, is sharply divided; one of the most important differences is the connection Canada maintains with the British Empire. While the United States established independence from the British monarchy, Canada did not. Consequently, when James fights with the Canadian Army he does so at the behest of Great Britain, for the Mother country, for the crown, and although these distinctions are vitally important to acknowledge, the fact remains that settlement of the greater North America began, in part, as an effort to rediscover Eden and the warmth of a metaphorical womb.

Judith Plant states, "Women have long been associated with nature: metaphorically, as in 'Mother Earth' [...] Our language says it all: a 'virgin' forest is one awaiting exploitation, as yet untouched by man (sic)" (213). This type of language is particularly burdened when referring to gardens. Gardens represent humanity's source of nourishment, our harvest, our proof of the struggle for life. It

follows that a woman's body has become a metaphor for garden, a space in which life is planted, nourished and grown. In either case, gardens foster growth, represent life, and capture the breath of spring; in short, they offer a metaphor for comfortable, familiar images. Therefore, Macdonald's title for the first book in *Fall on Your Knees*, 'The Garden,' carries a great deal of significance in orientating reader's exploration into the Piper family's lives.

Yet traditional images of the garden ultimately fail to provide the necessary tools to unlock Macdonald's greater messages, particularly for understanding the physical environment of the Piper family home. This garden does not conform to traditional representations. 'The Garden' chapter does not provide images of lush, fertile meadows; instead Macdonald asks instead readers to imagine the Canadian coastline of Nova Scotia with "Not many trees, thin grass" (9). New settlers faced a life encumbered by such realities as frigid temperatures, rocky soil, strong winds, and few trees. To assure the stability of their homes, settlers were forced to rope foundations into cliff-sides: "The silhouette of a colliery, iron tower against a slim pewter sky with cable and support sloping at forty-five-degree angles to the ground" (9). The rocky soil produced little and temperatures shortened growing seasons. Macdonald's title choice immediately situates audiences into a binary opposition from which one draws on traditional tropes and connotations associated with garden only to be jarred by the very opposite of such assumptions. Figuratively, the landscape of Macdonald's garden does not conform to the imaginative ideal of rolling hilltops or flourishing greenery; her garden grows against the backdrop of the maritime settlements along the rugged Canadian coastlines, a scene governed by

wind, rain, and graveled soil where “moss is the consolation of rocks, and fir trees don’t begrudge a shallow soil but return a tenfold embrace of boughs to shelter the skinny earth that bore them” (Macdonald 16). The landscape of Macdonald’s garden does not play into lazy days of idleness, but rather into the landscape of colonial reality where the “cold rock smell of the sea gave way to better cooked coal, and the gray mist became streaked with orange”<sup>13</sup> and the “mill put bread on the table and a fine orange dust on the bread” (60). Macdonald assaults the reader’s senses with the sight and smell of the detritus of energy production paralleling this with an introduction to James Piper.

The Piper family garden to which Macdonald ultimately refers does not produce sustainable produce nor does it relate to any image of growth or nurturing. Despite the fact that James travels “across the island to the Margaree and collected topsoil with no trace of coal dust” (46), the garden only produces “scrawny carrots and strange potatoes” (179). The problem with the Piper family garden has less to do with the soil and more to do with the poison buried beneath its surface. In fact, the garden is the site where all the family’s secrets are buried, under first the scarecrow and later a boulder. The garden is the place where physical and metaphorical growth stops for James Piper’s children following the death of Kathleen, James’ eldest daughter, and her son Ambrose. Instead of the garden being a place of bountiful production, the Piper garden represents forced assimilation, death, and arrested growth.

From the beginning of the novel, readers understand James Piper as a man separated from his environment, oppositional to nature. His character debunks the

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<sup>13</sup> Macdonald 16.

myth of “natural” belonging, and “emphasizes the provisionality and the constructedness of our relations to place” (O’Brien 143). Though James “discovered that there is nothing so congenial to lucid thought as a clear view of the sea” (16), this view appears to be one of the few aspects in his environment in which he finds value. He does not fit into his landscape, seeming always to force his environment to fit his needs:

James went out to the woods and cut down a *young* apple tree.

Stripped it of branches, sharpened it at both ends and drove it into the center of the garden. Nailed a plank of driftwood across it, and dressed it in one of Materia’s old frocks that she’d grown out of (Macdonald 46, emphasis mine).

Throughout the novel, James continually plucks the youthful, barely ripe fruit from the garden in an attempt to shape its growth. This passage demonstrates one of many instances where James turns Materia, his wife, into an enemy, and most importantly, links women and the earth. It is Materia’s clothes that mask the scarecrow, and therefore, metaphorically she must stand guard over the garden, a garden that eventually represents the site of her husband’s worst secrets.

A discussion of homeland further complicates garden descriptions, for though the Mahmoud and Piper families occupy the same physical space, the same physical garden on Canadian soil, references to their land of origin continue throughout the text. There exists a lasting fusion extracted from each character’s home of origin and those cultures and languages with which the character interacts. For example, Mrs. Mahmoud speaks little English, yet she converses easily with the

tradesman in Gaelic. Her home reflects a different fusion; the smells of tabouleh intermixed with the china figurines of English aristocracy. Macdonald's novel demands that readers consider a fusion in the soul that broadens possibilities for identity outside prescribed binaries. The novel reminds readers that multiple gardeners tend Canadian soil. The dialectical relationship between the land and its occupants speaks not so much to a literal interpretation, although it could address such "gardening" efforts as those performed by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, but to the ways culture might affect the development of a national identity. If all of humanity might have been affected by the simple action of a removal of an apple, then too, all of Canada has been affected by the multiplicity of cultures, what Herb Wylie calls "a site of ongoing redefinition, revision, and contestation" (216).

While superficially we might find the fusion of multiple cultures influencing language, décor, or cuisine, the greater message of the novel argues against easily earned success. According to Melanie Stevenson, "*Fall on Your Knees* does not merely acknowledge the diversity of the Canadian population: it also shows how fraught with complications the *perception* of the diversity is" (43). This is particularly true for the Mahmoud family whose background is Lebanese. Melanie Stevens asks: "Are they 'Mediterranean Europeans' or 'Arabs,' 'white' or 'coloured'?"<sup>14</sup> Though the Mahmonds might nurture an alliance with the dominant colonial authority, the British, it manifests as compliance, not hybridity. This is, in fact, the crisis of identification in Canada, cultural diversity defined as "the overlapping cultural differences and similarities of its citizens" (Tully 77). Macdonald subverts national myths celebrating diversity, asking readers to question connections to

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<sup>14</sup> Stevenson 42.



Empire and colonial patriarchy. Mr. Mahmoud demands his progeny maintain a pure lineage, and accordingly his daughter Materia “was betrothed to a dentist, promised when she was four. The dentist was still in the Old Country but was coming to marry her when she turned sixteen” (21). He maintains a patriarchy that enforces conformity to the Old Country, to Lebanon, to Arabic, to Catholicism, in short, to those systems in which he maintains absolute authority over his family. James thwarts not only his designs for bloodline purity, but also his authority. Although they occupy the same nation, James “colonizes” the Mahmoud garden coming “like a thief in the night and [stealing] another man’s property” (24). From Materia’s perspective, James is the prince in disguise: “The salt mist coming off Sydney Harbour crystallized in the fuzz above his lip and alighted on his lashes; he was Aladdin in an orchard dripping diamonds” (20). In Materia’s mind, James enters her world not as colonizer, but as a metaphor for the poor beggar whose worth has yet to be revealed to the world. More importantly he enters her ‘orchard,’ a direct reference to the home as a garden, a place of nurturing and growth, production and fullness.

Materia’s rich descriptions of courtship sharply contrast those of her suitor. While Materia sees James as part of her stories, inviting him into her garden, literally and figuratively, James views Materia as an opportunity. He states, “It was when she said *his name* in her soft buzzy way that his desire first became positively carnal” (21 *italic mine*). He views her betrothal to the dentist as ‘barbaric’, ‘backward’ and ‘savage.’ His descriptions of her focus on her darkness, her “coal-black curls,” her skin the “color of sand;” her brothers “James noted with some

distaste [...] could use a shave,” (23). They are “oily bastards.” James does not follow either Lebanese or British patriarchal convention when spirited Materia from her family to the hunting cabin, and reveals one of the dominant subtexts of the novel: James’ desire for young girls. If James is like the thief stealing into the garden for a piece of fruit, he chooses always those pieces that have not yet ripened. Briefly he acknowledges that he should “kiss her gently” because he “didn’t want to frighten her, he’s mail-ordered *What Every Husband Should Know* but decided never to touch her in that way if necessary” (22), but in the end he does not seem able to escape the force of his desire. Gabriella Parro contends this force derives from James’ hatred of his father, and the love he holds for his mother resurfaces in the form of his ‘demon’, his sexual attraction to his daughter Kathleen who reminds him so much of his mother (183). This desire can therefore also be viewed as James’ return to the womb, or Mother Earth if taken metaphorically. James, therefore, feels he must literally seed his garden to ensure authority, an act leading to the pollution of his family.

For Materia, her marriage and escape represent a severing from the Old Country and her family. At the age of six she had landed on the shores of Sydney Harbour and by twelve she had climbed out her window and “left the Old Country forever” (22). Following James and Materia’s idyllic sojourn, Materia’s family captures the couple, strips the flesh off James’ feet, slices Materia’s hair and because God is merciful and so was Mr. Mahmoud he “allowed James to convert to Catholicism in exchange for his life. And Mr. Mahmoud arranged for a good-sized house to be built for the newlyweds nine miles up the coast near Low Point” (24).

Mr. Mahmoud's compassion escapes in such actions as he provides space for the development of a new garden; however, he states, "As for my daughter. May God curse her womb" (24). In Mr. Mahmoud's perspective their union will never flourish and he afflicts Materia's physical garden, her womb, with his curse. Her identity becomes locked in limbo as she is no longer a member of the Mahmoud family, nor is she able to realize a full membership as a Piper. Her few moments of self-assertion are limited by opportunities she has to express herself through music and those times when James is absent.

Although Macdonald only briefly addresses World War I these moments confound specific identity and remind readers of the multiplicity of Canadian peoples. For Materia, the war offers an opportunity for freedom—freedom to raise her three daughters without worry; freedom to play piano in whatever genre she desires; freedom to speak Arabic; in short, freedom to embrace her identity. Without the toxic pollution of James, Materia flourishes within the boundaries available to her. She remains plump to the point of looking pregnant constantly. While Kathleen looks at her with disgust, this fullness could represent a bounty, a rich garden well fertilized. Though unable to strengthen the bond between herself and Kathleen, Materia nurtures her other daughters Mercedes and Frances as she would have liked to with her first daughter. Instead of cultivating an education reflecting colonial affiliation, Materia cultivates a love for her own garden, the Old Land. Her stories come not from books shipped over from England, but from her memory told to her daughters as she cooks meals. Still, Materia cannot recover her relationship with Kathleen, her cultivation restricted to basic care: "The house can never be hot

enough for the orchid on the second floor” (67). Without James’ presence, Materia can return to what might be thought of as “pre-colonial” days. She no longer must conform to his rules and strictures, his definitions concerning civilization and society. With James’ return, however, Materia is essentially left bereft. James inscribes all that surrounds her with his dominance, physically and spiritually. One need only be reminded of the hope chest, built for Materia’s needs, but instead manifesting as a hopeless reminder of her inability to become as James would have her.

Materia’s youth precludes her from understanding the reality of adult responsibilities, further enabling James’ control over her identity. Her childlike fantasies of a second elopement to New York annoy James, who after suffering physical and spiritual torture at the hands of Mr. Mahmoud, feels compelled to embrace the modes of patriarchy with new fervor despite telling his wife that what he,

resented most was that *enklese* nonsense. He wasn’t English, not a drop of English blood in him, he was Scottish and Irish, like ninety percent of this godforsaken island, not to mention Canadian. Filthy black Syrians.

‘Lebanese,’ said Materia. (26)

James nurtures a more authentic connection to Great Britain, sending to “England for a crate of books” and reading the “*Halifax Chronicle*” to get a perspective on the world outside this island—the real world.” (28) In these days, James fetishizes knowledge and books, believing they will help him realize not only a superior authority over his father-in-law, but also help mold him into the perfect Canadian

citizen of the British Empire. David Spurr argues that anything in print: journals, scientific papers, maps or “documents of colonial administration” set up the “logical oppositions between writing and blankness, knowledge and doubt, culture and nature, civilization and savagery” (163-64). The colonial appropriation of knowledge through language negates non-Western speech as well, “where the Western style of speaking is not present, there is no language at all” (Spurr 107). Materia languishes in boredom, unable to comprehend James’ motive or desire, unable to understand his language. Their relationship evolves from lovers to parents to child-type interactions in which, for example, James “assigned her a chapter a day of *Great Expectations* in order to cultivate a love of reading and at suppertime he quizzed her.” (30) James tries to continue her growth, to stimulate and mold her development, not unlike that of a gardener shaping a plant he cultivates.

Materia is afforded little space in which to grow. James prunes her creativity, a creativity she expresses in her piano playing that he hears as ‘racket.’ He negates her presence with neglect and disregard. The more emotional Materia becomes, the more she expresses herself through her piano playing. James realizes he cannot force her to become the type of wife he desires: “deep down he winced at the thought of showing Materia to anyone” (30), so he locks the piano and tells her, “I’m not cooking anymore and I’m not cleaning. You do your job, missus, ‘cause Lord knows I’m doing mine” (31). Despite his manipulative efforts to deny her any genuine pleasure, James fails to make Materia adopt the identity he expects. James continues to see Materia as ‘dumpy,’ ‘sad,’ and ‘ugly.’ She has a “flaccid face” and a blank stare. She is not even as smart as a ‘dumb animal.’

James's animalistic description of *Materia* echoes the statements used to justify racial hierarchies that helped rationalize colonial actions. As Spurr writes, "Colonial discourse [...] naturalizes the process of domination: it finds a natural justification for the conquest of nature and of primitive peoples, those 'children of nature'" (156). Canadian identity, however, is tied to an idea that

[They] are the world's reigning experts at imagining how other people think and feel, even about [themselves]. [They] can put [themselves] in somebody else's shoes at the drop of a maple leaf [...] Bilingualism, multiculturalism, and religious and political pluralism are all part of the complicated mix that [they] call Canadian society. People talk about Canada being an act of will. It may be more correct to say it's an act of willingness. To be Canadian means to be willing to shrug off your own identity so you can imagine what it's like to be someone else.<sup>15</sup>

*Fall on Your Knees* provides examples for Susan Delacourt's claim, particularly through the character Kathleen Piper. This almost mutable identity speaks to what Canadians worry is a lack of a significant identity. Robert Brym argues that the "Great Canadian Identity Trap" ("The thesis is that English-Canadians are just like Americans. The antithesis is that English-Canadians are fundamentally different from Americans")<sup>16</sup> prevents Canadians from realizing a stable identity. His premise could be applied to Canada's connection to Great Britain as well; it could also be

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<sup>15</sup> Delacourt, Susan. "Culture and National Identity". The Fraser Institute. 2/19/2010

<<http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html>>.

<sup>16</sup> Brym 493.

understood on an individual level to consider how citizens themselves have varying connections to nations outside of Canada.

Margaret Atwood writes

In a typical American plot, the immigrant throws away his old values [...] and espouses egalitarian democracy. The price America demands is a leap into the melting pot [...] to efface all traces of his ethnic origins in order to become a real “American,” to take on a new identity [...] Canada does not demand a leap into the melting pot [...] if he does wipe away his ethnic origin, there is no new ‘Canadian’ identity ready for him to step into: he is confronted by nebulosity, a blank; no ready-made ideology is provided for him. (180)

Scholars and writers alike seem constantly confounded in their efforts to define Canadian identity. This lack of either/or consistency is advanced in Macdonald's novel as her heroines resist traditional binary conclusions for gender or identity. Accordingly, gender identity becomes analogous to national identity (national identities having traditionally been limited by patriarchal and/or colonial hierarchies based on racial difference) in that both should not be bound to constructed definitions of selfhood. As Corey Frost states “the counter narrative challenges to nation come from a mixture of communities in various dominant-subordinate relations to one another, such that binary colonial roles are not easy to assign” (198).

Kathleen Piper's resistance resonates throughout the novel. Kathleen's body is not only representative of Canadian space, but of Piper space as well. She

represents the hybrid breed despite her “silky red-gold hair, green eyes and white white skin” (40). Kathleen’s angelic-like nature is further enhanced by her voice, “Kathleen sang before she talked. Perfect pitch” (41). Though James believes she is a gift to him from God, and he is most reminded of his mother, her voice “comes from the Mahmoud side, of course. All the men and women of his family sing” (114). Thus, Kathleen occupies that ‘space in between,’ the space between two races, two skin colors, two cultures, just as Canadian space too occupies a ‘space in between,’ the space between countries, cultures, and people. James cannot compromise his control over this space, cannot compromise his place in the hierarchy of the patriarchy. Consequently, when James discovers his daughter’s love affair with Rose, a New York African- American jazz pianist, he quickly reaffirms both his place and hers by raping and impregnating her. This act simultaneously reifies the Old World’s rape of colonial lands as well as uses Kathleen’s womb as the site for the literal colonization of feminine space. This act, far from guaranteeing a pure garden, simply contaminates the Piper family. Kathleen’s subsequent pregnancy marks the last resource James is able to extract from her, and the final days of her pregnancy are spent marginalized in the upper corner of their home. Her death following the birth of twins eliminates her space altogether.

When race becomes an issue, James assumes dominance despite the fact that the British would have viewed his Irish-Scot ancestry as similar to African. The constructed connotations of race become more important than the physical manifestations. Spurr advances the idea that the ideology of colonialism derives support from 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific theory which sees the colonizing process as a



“counterpart, in the development of human society, to natural evolution” (161). If patriarchal hierarchies are not permeable, evolution is somewhat mutable, capable of accommodating circumstances that demand restructured difference. Even if James cannot transform his physical being, he can construct, with careful pruning and shaping, the identity he believes reflects a Canadian national. Part of this Canadian identity remains tied to an environment that defied taming: a wild that would not stop; a ground that refused widespread cultivation, in short, a life of pure survival. Working in this period of settlement, Macdonald parallels exploration that sought to transform the land for the benefit of colonizing nations with a sense of misogyny, a common theme of colonial dominance that often placed land and woman together. *Fall on Your Knees* asks readers to consider how Canadian national identity fits. Despite references to multiculturalism, a disconnection between the peoples remains:

James couldn't place the man's accent and never realized he was black from Barbados, just knew he was Albert who never got the killed. Barbados, Italy, Belgium, Eastern Europe, Quebec [...] The Dominion Coal Company had reached far and wide to break the strike. Very few English voices in the darkness and those that there were were heavily accented. (52)

Melanie Stevenson proposes that

The way in which race shifts between being visible and invisible for the characters mirrors the theme of hidden identity in Macdonald's work [...] she not only foregrounds the hidden multi-racial identity of

Canada, but also examines the act of hiding it in a settler-invader society where some origins convey more class than others. (47)

The dialectical relationship between the land and occupants speaks not so much to a literal interpretation, although it could speak to such “gardening” as performed by the Dominion Iron and Steel Company extraction of resources, but to the ways culture might affect the development of national identity. If all of humanity might have been affected by the simple action of a removal of an apple, then all of Canada, too, has arguably been affected by the multiplicity of cultures. According to Neil Evernden, knowing who you are is impossible without knowing where you are; humans draw their identity from place (101). Indeed, Macdonald continues this theme when the strike is ended; and though James is curious to see Albert outside in the light, he discovers that “Albert had been let go” and more people are coming in from the West Indies because the Dominion Iron and Steel Company “knew the value of a strong man who could stand heat” (60). Thus, race is an integral part of settlement and creation of the Canadian landscape, but each immigrant settlement in no way establishes a particular vision and remains mired in “absence, innocence, silence, emptiness, negation, deficiency, belatedness, and blankness [...] Canadian national identity is our country’s lack of distinctive or unique qualities” (Baetz 64).

The most memorable metaphor addressing this motif directly is Macdonald’s Book Two title, ‘No Man’s Land’. ‘No Man’s Land’ refers not only to the literal space within which James finds himself during the war, but also applies to those bereft of a singular identity. While the first half of the novel is dedicated to exploring ‘The Garden’, the second section shifts reader’s focus to examine the dangers

encountered in the repression and burial of sexual aberration. Consequently, Macdonald's work excavates the layers of experience, loss, grief, and abuse that shape the development of the Piper family as well as their development as members of the larger community of Sydney. This excavation process means examining the physical space of gardens; and by this logic, the physical garden outside the Piper home becomes analogous to the difficult and polluted environment provided in their home. It means examining the tragic death of Kathleen and Materia as well as the mysterious death of Ambrose. It means looking again into the hope chest, no longer empty, but instead a vessel for the detritus of a family permanently haunted by the abuse of James Piper. It means understanding the dynamics of a family, now only three children and father. It means understanding a shift that leaves the eldest, Mercedes, playing the role of her mother, and Frances, a scape-goat for her father's anger. It means considering how Lily, a sister who is not really a sister, a cripple, and daddy's new favorite, provides physical proof of the family's darkest transgressions and becomes the means through which healing is eventually realized. Finally, it means understanding the thematic and metaphoric work of the garden as an issue of space and/or place; the text asks readers to consider how we value space, how we understand our environment, nature and what potential consequences result from our value systems.

For James, the 'No Man's Land' refers to his experience during the war, the literal space between fronts through which he would courier messages. Yet, it is not James' experience that begins this section of the novel, but Kathleen's and Materia's. Materia must choose to save Kathleen, her daughter, or save the babies.

The space in between refers to that space between death and life—or where the mother's life ends and the babies' begins. The space in between refers to the nanosecond in which one must make a decision that has an outcome which we can never anticipate. It refers to the space between twins:

The air splashes and spumes against it, threatening to drown it—  
*them*—for there are two but they have yet to be cut in half, they are still  
one creature, really male and female segments joined at the belly by a  
common root system. (132)

It refers to the what Franz Fanon argues that every colonized people experiences: the “death and burial of its local cultural originality” and the “culture of the mother country” (18). Kathleen is the space in between: she is Piper and Mahmoud, black and white, Canadian and (perhaps) American. Kathleen's body becomes the space for a garden, a colonization of patriarchal inscription, a space in which roots have been nurtured and male and female have become one.

James' shame arrives as twins: a girl, Lily and a boy, Ambrose. Materia's efforts to save her daughter have failed from beginning to end. The relationship between James and Materia, already in a rapid state of deterioration, ceases altogether. Just as Kathleen's pregnancy leaves her devoid of resources from which James might harvest, so too does Kathleen's pregnancy and death leave Materia death-like: “Materia doesn't move a muscle. She is a pair of eyes now, that's all she is. A desert with eyes” (153). In this brief passage, Materia now represents Lebanon completely; she is a desert, that ‘space in between’ oasis and oasis, that space without resource. Neither woman's landscape offers any fertility, thus, both

die within days of one another. Adding to James' disgrace, the baby Ambrose is lost in the pond-waters mid-baptism, producing yet another death and another announcement card to stuff into the hope chest. Each moment of James' violation, each time he further pollutes his environment and family, the hope chest suffers the burden of hiding the truths: "*Put it in the hope chest, James. Yes. That's a good place for it. No one ever rummages in there*" (139). The "space in between," that space between top and bottom of the hope chest, holds the family's truths: the broken doll, the tattered Tartan, the Baptism gown, the dead cat, the dead sister, and, finally the family tree. Within the wooden home, the family tree, the family's metaphorical connection to nature lies hidden, haunted by a rape that has left some branches stunted and others connected, so that the family's development reflects less a natural evolution, and more of a reification of James' tortured efforts to realize an English gentleman's identity.

What cannot be hidden in the depths of the hope chest, James buries in the Earth. Ambrose, the male proof of his incestuous desire, lies hidden under the scarecrow, Pete:

James tears the scarecrow free of the earth. Its body was impaled on a stake and that stake must have been green wood, because now that Daddy has yanked the pointed end from the ground you can see it is alive with pale sprouting roots. Eventually a tree would have grown right up through the scarecrow [...] Imagine if you had a tree growing inside your skin [...] imagine seeing the green leaves everywhere, trapped just under your skin and growing, imagine seeing the thin roots

swirling under the surface of the soles of your feet, their white ends  
looking for a place to poke through. The earth is a magnet for roots.

(151)

James uproots Pete just as he has uprooted Materia, just as he uproots Kathleen, in order to bury his desire. In this passage, Macdonald poignantly imagines a very real connection between Nature and humanity. The last statement, “The earth is a magnet for roots,” suggests that humanity, Nature, and life are drawn to earth, drawn to the stability and resources found in a connection to them. Burying Ambrose beneath the scarecrow temporarily relieves James of the weight of his responsibility; however, within moments of having polluted this space with the physical representation of his unnatural desire, James molests his third child, his daughter Frances. Thus, again, James continues to repeat a cycle in which he contaminates his environment. If women’s bodies represent Nature, or Earth, then James’ actions pollute these spaces. Seemingly unable to escape this cycle, the Piper family occupies ‘No Man’s Land’, a tenuous grasp between heaven and hell, in which the father’s efforts to dominate the landscape have poisoned the entire family tree. Joel Baetz argues that these liminal spaces become the “sites of negotiation where individuals and communal identities [are] challenged, rebuffed, accepted, or confirmed [...] the characters learn to live with ghosts” (76).

Frances Piper is perhaps the most obsessed with these ghosts. She works constantly to subvert her father’s dominance, and therefore challenges his ideas about gender and identity as well. It is not without some irony that Francis wears a dirty ‘Girl Guide’ uniform to walk to and from her nightly burlesque performances at a

nearby bar. Frances has learned from her father what space, and what resources, might be exploited by others. Frances has a willingness to experiment with her sexuality with the boys on the playground: "She grabbed and jerked while he cried. The harder he got, the harder he cried, he couldn't help either one and it didn't take long, he was only fifteen" (274). She also is willing to perform: "The following Saturday will see her stripped from the waist up, wearing James's old horsehair war sporran as a wig, singing, 'I'm Just Wild About Harry' in pidgin Arabic" (275). She demonstrates tangible evidence of her knowledge linking women's bodies to colonial domination. She understands the economic value of her innocence and sells it accordingly. She comprehends her body's capital value, knowing enough to maintain her virginity throughout her business transactions. Frances, therefore, takes back some kind of feminine space by keeping the money made from the use of her resources. Unlike Kathleen and Materia, Frances does not allow James to keep the resources he continually robs. Lily, Frances and Mercedes are important to one another's stories as each tries to reestablish a feminine space within the confines of a society dominated by the economic and societal mandates of patriarchy.

Despite James' efforts to cut his family from nature, separating his family from the water of baptism, from the unpolluted smell of cedar and the Old Country, from the clean Earth of the garden, Frances' action works to reunite the family with nature and bridge the rift built by her father's unnatural desire. James cannot break this daughter, cannot beat her enough: "She's as beat as she'll ever be" (274). Unable to dominate Frances, James turns his attention toward Lily; he nurtures her in the

same manner he did Kathleen, though Lily will never fully replace Kathleen as she has a lame leg after battling polio. It seems as though her body has betrayed the secret of her origin, her crippled body mocking her father's rape. If Lily represents a reified Kathleen, readers might understand her also as an example of the anxious Canadian nationality. Lily is not the sister she must pretend to be, nor is she the daughter James tries to replace. She is neither fully Gaelic, nor fully Lebanese, but an incestuous mixture of the two. Like Canadian identity, Lily represents cultural diversity that is "overlapping cultural differences and similarities of [...] citizens" (Tully 77). Celebrating Armistice Day, Lily and James join the town to attend a parade:

They are fiercely proud of their veterans, yet bitter about the Canadian army that has so often invaded the coalfields. In spite of this, the armed forces are increasingly an option for the jobless and the working poor looking to get off this cursed godforsaken rock that they love more than the breath in their own lungs. (229)

Like Lily, Canadian identity has been shaped by love and hate, pride and shame, a *mélange* of fractured events leaving its peoples slightly broken in some manner or another. Like Lily, Frances, too, represents this mode of Canadian identity, an identity shaped by what the land has to give by its resources, and not by human-nature. Joel Baetz contends that Lily's ability to face the uncanny, to live with the ghost of her brother, allows her to accept repression and models "cultural understanding" that is contrary to her father's refusal to live "in-between" (78). Lily's character asks readers to consider broader definitions for identity as she does not fit



the either/or gender conclusions advanced by James or the patriarchal society in which she lives.

Macdonald attempts to broaden these definitions through Frances as well. James' (and, by extension, those of the colonial powers his character represents) efforts to dominate nature replicate his desire to dominate feminine space. Macdonald's work throughout the novel linking females and nature permits a reading that casts James not only as a misogynist, but also as the dominant other whose mastery over the feminized binary codes seems almost implicit. In order to heal the breach made by James with Materia, to reject the "morbid tendency in the blood they inherited from Materia that made Kathleen lean toward color" (335), and to heal the breach made by James with the pond, the hope chest, and Earth, Frances returns to the wounds of colonial exploitation in an effort to seed rebirth: the mine shaft.

Following the birth of the twins, Kathleen's body is described as an "abandoned mine," a body void of resources (132). Macdonald reminds readers that James does not respect this space; it is simply a space to exhume resources. With this description, Macdonald makes a clear connection between the female body and nature. Furthermore, in alluding to mining Macdonald links Kathleen to Canada. Throughout the novel Macdonald references the history of mining, beginning with the first pages' descriptions of the mining town: "company houses, company town." Dominion Iron and Steel exercises enormous influence upon Canadian space as well as Piper family space. James' descent into the pit to support Kathleen's singing career marks his most intense shame. His personal struggle illuminates a much larger political struggle held between laborers for the mine and owners as James'

willingness to cross picket-lines for what he believes to be a superior cause helps illustrate the types of moral, ethical, and (perhaps more important) economic conflicts resulting from Canada's status as a member of the British Empire. Canada was not only a place to which England could ship its societal excess; it also represented a place from which the latter could take valuable resources such as lumber and coal. Anne McClintock states, "Clambering from the mine laden with gems the size of 'pigeon eggs,' the white Englishmen gave birth to three orders—the male, *reproductive* order of patriarchal monogamy; the white *economic* order of mining capital; and the global *political* order of empire" (4). Thus, integral to a discussion of Kathleen's space in the novel are parallel discussions concerning eco-criticism, post-colonialism and feminism.

Like James, Dominion Iron and Steel Company harvests from the Canadian lands that which is most ripe. If settlers were disappointed by the lack of Eden-like bounty, they found instead a garden rich in natural resources that became fuel for the Empire. In the same way James saw Kathleen's singing talents and beauty as a means for reclamation, so, too, did the corporations see "The Coke Ovens" as a means for a profitable future. James' reclamation lies in education and repression of unnatural desires. This belief is best demonstrated with the birth of the first Piper child, Kathleen. Materia's pregnancy represents two conflicting possibilities. For Materia this pregnancy offers an opportunity to return to her father's grace: "Her father would be hard pressed to disown a first grandson even if it came to him through a daughter [...] Oh Lady, please, Dear Mary, let it be a boy" (37). For James, if his efforts to cultivate Materia have failed, then he will take no chances

with his daughter. Though readers may not be aware of such a progression initially, Kathleen becomes the wife James believes not only represents the true spirit of Canadian identity, but also the wife worthy of himself: “She was going to grow up a lady. She’d have accomplishments. Everyone would see. He felt like a king” (38). Far from respecting Materia’s body as a fertile garden worthy of respect, or even viewing her accomplishments as a woman as being painful and labor intensive, he further abuses her:

James plunked his wife onto the chair and put the screeching baby into her arms. ‘Now feed her.’

But the mother just blubbered and babbled.

‘Speak English, for Christ’s sake.’

*‘Ma bi’der, Biwajeaal.’<sup>17</sup>*

He slapped her. ‘If she doesn’t eat, you don’t eat. Understood?’

In a few days the pump was primed and the baby was sucking. But the mother cried through every feeding. One evening in the fourth week of Kathleen’s life, James snatched his child from the breast in horror.

‘You’ve hurt her, Jesus Christ, you’ve cut her lip?’—for the baby’s smile was bright with blood. Materia just sat there, mute as usual, her dress open, her nipples cracked and bleeding, oozing milk. James took one look and realized that the child would have to be weaned before it was poisoned. (39)

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<sup>17</sup> I want to die.

Readers experience in this scene the layers of misunderstanding and prejudice that reach such a level as James believing his wife's milk will poison his baby. James does not understand Materia's post-partum depression, the physical realities of nursing, or, worst of all, the way his desire has shaped the woman in front of him. Materia, too, does not understand her own body, her level of depression or the ways in which she might care for her wounded breasts. However, less important is the misunderstanding of the physical realities of breast feeding both experience, and more important are the ways in which this passage illuminates profound theoretical disparities. Materia discovers nothing natural about breast-feeding, motherhood, being a wife, or even loving your baby. As she struggles to define her role in Kathleen's life, she finds only two ways to manifest her maternal connection: one, she knows that "in an emergency, any Catholic can baptize a child" (47) and two, she knows that "loving the girl now seems like the easy task compared with protecting her" (64). No longer is Materia the unsettled, new land, open and ripe for settlement; Kathleen assumes this position, complicating an already weighty metaphor.

Following the birth of Kathleen, James' perception of his wife changes; he wonders: "How had he been ensnared by a child? She had seduced him [...] Perhaps it was a racial flaw" (40). Their relationship represents an example of the worst possibilities for cultural conflict. His attraction and revulsion represent a "discourse which alternately idealizes and reviles the savage [and] may be seen as part of [a] larger ambivalence surrounding the unstable concepts of nature and man" (Spurr 159). James does not care to shape Materia, to cultivate her; instead his

attitude reflects disdain and his efforts almost entirely marginalize her. Her struggles to make a connection to Kathleen are denied:

Feeding the child some lovely mush at the kitchen table, Materia  
leaned forward and cooed, '*Ya Helwi. Ya albi, ya Amar. Te'berini.*'<sup>18</sup>

'Don't do that, Materia.'

'What?'

'I don't want her growing up confused. Speak English.' (40)

Spurr aptly points out: "where Western style of speaking is not present, there is no language at all" (107). Materia's efforts to express herself through music are denied as well: "Materia was permitted to play piano again, this time exactly what was put in front of her" (41). Materia becomes, for James, a vessel through which he can channel his frustrated sexual desire and cultivate his ideal lover, Kathleen. Materia's refrain, "Okay," edges out the small space permitted for her voice, a space now dominated by James. According to Spurr, he projects a Western problematic through a non-Western people to "systematically [represent] in terms of negation and absence [...] Their zero-degree of existence [providing] both a justification for the colonizing enterprise and an imaginary empty space for the projection of a modernist angst" (96).

James' new focus, Kathleen, dominates his life in a manner he would never have thought possible. To foster her growth, James does what he promised his mother he would never do: he goes to the mines. His shame does end there, however, for he also sends his wife to work for Kathleen's expensive education. Every dollar goes to purchasing the best for Kathleen. She will be the singer, the

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<sup>18</sup> I'm pretty nice, my darling, my moon, accompanied me.

world renowned opera diva. Unfortunately, not unlike her mother and father, Kathleen's growth is stunted as she, too, is caught by her father's obsessive need for patriarchal dominance. James is driven by the apparent need to assert some kind of control, some kind of possession of feminine space. His efforts to repress his sexual desire by and large fail, as evidenced by numerous passages in the text, the first of which begins with Kathleen:

A life and a warmth enter his body that he hasn't felt since—that he has rarely felt. She will be safe with him, I'll keep you safe, my darling, oh, how he loves this girl. He holds her close, no harm, never any harm. Her hair smells like the raw edge of spring, her skin is the silk of a thousand spinning wheels, her breath so soft and fragrant, *milk and honey are beneath your tongue* [...] Then he shocks himself. (63)

World War I saves this family, despite the complex connotations simultaneously engaged. James enters the war as a soldier for the British Empire, and a member of the Canadian army. The war takes James out of the home and, therefore, away from the temptation of committing an act of incest so clearly hinted in the above passage. The war takes James into Europe and suicide missions, dead bodies and kilts. The Canadian army commander speaks Gaelic. The Luvovitz's, James' neighbors, have family in German; their sons will fight their cousins. The war translates into "slender wounds in the earth across Europe, these sturdy beams holding back the tide of mud and human tissue [...] like fallen teeth" (104). The war itself echoes the description of a mine shaft- it tears open society just as a mine shaft tears open the Earth.

Yet, the mineshaft is where Frances begins her project of reclamation.

Frances finds a second home in an abandoned mine shaft:

An opening in the earth a third of the way up a steep slop of limestone, thing grass and scant soil. Crazy pine trees grow parallel to the slant here and there. An archway in the earth. No inscription. An abandoned bootleg mine. A drift mine, the type that cuts into a hillface and burrows horizontally. (250)

The mineshaft represents the tangible rupture left by colonial capitalism that claimed all manner of resource from Canadian land for the benefit of the Empire. Frances has suffered a similar rupture at the hands of her father; thus, the communion Macdonald writes between Frances and the mines seems analogous. Returning to the mineshaft, Frances seduces Leo Taylor, a black man, in an effort to become pregnant. Frances only wants Taylor; she only wants his seed. A reunion with Taylor, a reunion with the Other, signifies a move away from the mastery of Piper patriarchy and a return to her “subversive” mother. It means acknowledging and accepting a desire for the Other, especially in the environment Frances chooses. Reestablishing feminine space for Frances means communion with nature and reunion with her mother. She can imagine no other space in which to seduce Leo Taylor, nor does she pursue sexual intercourse with any other man. Her desire to seduce Leo suggests a reconnection to her “dark” Lebanese heritage, as well as an implicit argument for diversity through multiplicity. Descriptions of Frances’ pregnancy cannot help but connote a very Earthy woman: “She has been washing, stroking, feeding, drying a woman who is blooming like a hothouse rose. The

nipples look ready to burst and scatter seed, the russet pubic hair hangs proud like a bunch of grapes” (386). It is the rich description of harvest-like bounty that lends itself to the imagery of colonial domination where “the New World landscape [was] not merely an object of domination and exploitation, but a maternal ‘garden,’ receiving and nurturing human children” (Kolondy 172).

Frances subverts this narrative in her purposeful miscegenation. She simultaneously advances a script for multiplicity as an answer for a Canadian future. Unable and unwilling to conform to her father's definition of femininity, humanity or even Canadian-ness; Frances suffers continuous physical abuse. If Kathleen Piper represents the mother with whom James desired to reconnect, Frances represents the father he wants to hurt. While his oldest daughter Mercedes fills the role of housewife, his second daughter entertains his physical needs. Lily, his daughter by Kathleen, assumes Kathleen's place as favorite daughter; the whole cycle laid out again for reenactment. Macdonald's answer to James' abuse comes not from patriarchy, but from Frances. Reconnection to the Earth and nature, healing and reclamation are not the exclusive rights of Lily, though she aids in the final project. In the end, however, it is Anthony, Frances' son, who finally exhumes the Piper family's ghosts.

James Piper is not the only one who tries to bury these ghosts. While he is guilty of physically inscribing feminine space throughout the novel, his daughter Mercedes is his faithful record keeper. Though female and occupying the place her mother would have had had she remained alive, Mercedes does not function as a heroine in the novel. Mercedes' relationship to the church nurtures within her a



sense of patriarchy that she then tries to inscribe on the siblings she is forced to raise. Mercedes celebrates her mother's memory, which is best illustrated with her love and devotion for the Catholic Church. Macdonald herself, in an interview, has acknowledged this relationship as reifying patriarchy.<sup>19</sup> Thus Mercedes' efforts to reestablish feminine space become limited within space as defined by Catholic doctrine. Accordingly, she views Lily as special, perhaps divinely so. She views Frances' pregnancy as perilous. Mercedes' identity becomes intimately connected to her role as mother and protector for her sisters, especially Frances. Thus, Frances' pregnancy potentially threatens her identity, her space. Mercedes translates feminine space as motherhood, but this translation has become complicated by her deeply dysfunctional childhood. Mercedes, although never directly subjected to her father's abuse, has been haunted by the memories of watching her sister's sexual abuse, her mother's physical abuse, and her guilt in pushing her father down the stairs. Mercedes' celebration of space is locked in her meticulous search to nurture the family tree, to reclaim some kind of motherhood—in other words, in an abstract manner. This is also reflected in her choice to teach, as well as in her continued supervision of Frances' child, Anthony. Her connection to nature is metaphorical through the family tree, as is her connection to motherhood.

Understanding Macdonald's connection to nature means understanding nature as reflected through multiple tropes. In the final pages of the novel, the

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview with Melanie Lockhart, Macdonald admits that the "Catholic Church is really a huge influence for me personally, and I recognize that's also a huge influence on the world" (148). She believes that the Catholic Church's invention of such constructed symbols as the Virgin Mary have helped maintain the misogyny and patriarchy by providing examples of perfected femininity as well as offering a specifically "feminine" space through which limited agency within the church is provided. This agency reifies the patriarchy, keeping women "subservient to the Vatican" (149).

resounding theme of the family tree makes one last effort to remind readers of the link between humanity and nature. For the Piper family, the family tree represents a source of pollution. Haunted by their father's abuse as well as Mercedes' strong affiliation with the Church, the Piper tree becomes marred by loss, broken branches, unhealthy dependencies; in short, their tree reflects the reality of a post-colonial Canada. Canada, too, suffered the abuse from patriarchal dominance through the colonial exploitation of the British Empire. If Frances must establish the physical connection and Mercedes the abstract or metaphorical connection, in the end it is Lily who connects the two efforts into a tangible realization. Lily returns to New York City to reconnect with Rose, her mother's lover. Lily opens the door to Anthony to welcome him into his family, to heal the fractured family tree. In a very tangible way, Macdonald asks readers to consider the manner in which nature has been perceived as well as the ways in which healing might begin. Recognition, communion, and celebration of multiplicity are just a few of the answers Macdonald provides for contemplation. In writing females as analogous to natural spaces, Macdonald runs the risk of participating in a theoretical essentializing of females that reifies the boundaries of binary codes; however, Macdonald utilizes these themes to subvert the cultural metaphors that marginalize the Other.

Each time audiences expect to understand a particular element, Macdonald turns those expectations upside down. The young love, far from idyllic, becomes a toxic pollution from which Materia cannot escape. The educated gentleman seems more desirous of particularly young women. Shying away from an essentialist statement, the text does not demonstrate a natural mother or a natural wife. Far

from the melting pot image of cultures fusing together, readers experience a society delineated through shades of skin. The landscape, far from inviting and nurturing, belches pollution from coal mines that support not only the war effort, but also the British Empire. The garden, far from being a rich environment full of vegetation and life has been described as rocky, treacherous, and tainted. James hopes the cure to his blight will be to send Kathleen away; consequently, he returns to the Mahmoud home to ask for financial backing. Mr. Mahmoud does not want to help his 'dead' daughter's child; however, he writes a check after his wife persuades him and "tells himself that he does it for Giselle. But as he writes the third zero, he reflects upon the future of the family voice. Universally acclaimed. The crowning glory of his success in the New World" (116). Kathleen's voice becomes yet another space in which male patriarchy asserts dominance. Mr. Mahmoud's similarity to James operates on this level if no other; both desire an inscription of their name, whether through racial purity, dominance, or desire. In linking such patriarchal modalities to the Earth in the form of gardens and females, Macdonald demonstrates not only the ways in which feminine spaces become dominated, but also natural spaces as well. Feminizing landscapes, such as gardens, and linking them to feminine space, such as wombs, offers further foundation for conclusion that connect gender and ecology.

Macdonald's work, above all, shows the subtle connections between various human systems. A similar statement could be made concerning the subtle connections between various theoretical rubrics. These connections ensure an interdependency that should encourage empathy and compassion; however, as Macdonald's novel demonstrates, these ideals become lost in translation if usurped

by a system seeking dominance and mastery. Canadian national identity cannot be detached from English colonialism, the English Empire, French colonialism, the French revolution, the American Revolution, and a myriad of historical effects. Nor can Canadian national identity be divorced from the influence of multiple cultures and the benefits as well as troubles caused by such a co-mingling. Macdonald's overarching theme, perhaps, argues for the recognition of a complex balance important to maintaining civilization, a balance that recognizes nature as one of the partners.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### 'IT WAS SUPPOSE TO BE DIFFERENT': CANADIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND NATURAL SPACES IN ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S *THE WAY THE CROW FLIES*

Ann-Marie Macdonald's work encourages a pluralist definition of Canadian identity as it acknowledges possibilities that deconstruct the dominant notions of a homogenized national identity. If Macdonald's first novel *Fall on Your Knees* asks readers to consider "What difference does difference make?",<sup>20</sup> then her second novel *The Way the Crow Flies* explores how expectations might construct these differences and help shape individual as well as national identities. *Fall on Your Knees* reads didactically, as a warning demonstrating the dangers of myopia, and ultimately encourages a multiplicity of peoples and desire as an alternative to limited definitions. *The Way the Crow Flies* moves beyond cautionary exploration to examine the effects of competing binary tensions created by normative definitions of what it means to be a man and a woman. Fundamentally Macdonald's work demands that readers "question the sincerity of Canadian beliefs about diversity and multiculturalism" (Nurse 39), a belief connected to one of the ways Canadians define themselves as a nation. In addition to interrogating individual identity, Macdonald's novel explores the complexities of "Canadian-ness."

The novel's first scene draws readers into a section of forest where the new grass and "tiny white bell-heads of the lily of the valley" signal the "early spring stirrings," and "a stream [...] so refreshing to the ear" ripples through the shade (2). Juxtaposed with the image of peaceful renewal, Macdonald writes: "The birds saw

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<sup>20</sup> Georgis, Dina; Matthews, Sara and Trish Salah. "Introductory Notes-Memory Foretelling the Story: Essays on *Fall on Your Knees*." *Canadian Review of American Studies*. 35.2 (2005): 125-139.

the murder” (2). If the settlers brought a pastoral metaphor for pristine nature, if wilderness offers what Garrad describes as the “promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth,” then pages of the authentic wilderness written as a murder scene challenge this promise. Throughout the novel readers experience these moments of serene nature: scenes of crows and forests, a little girls’ bracelet torn from her wrist, and a dialogue that echoes the narrative style of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* on some pages and the distressed headlines of a newspaper on others, all the while not fully comprehending the impact of those actions that have helped construct these images. Macdonald destabilizes the dichotomy of natural/unnatural spaces by creating an unnatural scene in a symbolically natural space. In fact, *The Way the Crow Flies* explores notions of wilderness and gender to understand how constructed definitions have not only forcibly subjugated marginalized peoples and land, but also engaged patriarchal histories that silence the stories of trauma. These “new” histories emerge as war stories, testifying to the violence of inscription. These efforts to destabilize limited binary definitions for gender and nature gesture toward a broader understanding of Canadian identity as well, and fractures liberal assumptions of an easy multiculturalism. Macdonald’s second novel contests the either/or conclusions of essential versus constructed identities because she addresses gender in a manner that deconstructs natural versus unnatural spaces. In the end, Macdonald’s novel asks readers to consider broader definitions for womanhood, and specifically sexuality, suggesting that diversity will ensure survival.

The answers to “Who am I?” have clear ties to nation, yet like identity, the concept of nation has murky definitions. Benedict Anderson contends that a nation is an “imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). These imagined communities are constructed based on a “horizontal comradeship” employing a bureaucratic vernacular to suggest a deeper belonging. Anderson believes that capitalism, and particularly colonialism, lends itself to administrative units that reify colonial identities (165). While Anderson’s work has inspired many to focus on the artificiality of nationhood, Immanuel Wallerstein’s definition of nation focuses on the connection between nation and state:

Nationalism often takes the form of constructing links between one side of each of the antinomies into fused categories, so that, for example one might create the norm that adult White heterosexual males of particularly ethnicities and regions are the only ones who would be considered “true” nationals. (39)

Wallerstein states that belonging to a nation is a “status-group identity [...] based as it is on a structure of sovereign states located within an interstate system” (54). Nationalism, he argues, cements the interstate system. This exchange does not occur without profound consequences, particularly for women. According to Anne McClintock, nation is synonymous with gender; nations “represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence” (89). Like Anderson, she believes nations are “phantasmagoria of the mind,” a system of cultural representation “whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community, they are historical practices through

which social difference is both invented and performed” (89). Nations legitimize and limit access to resources, and despite assumptions of shared investment in unit, nations “historically amount to the sanction[ed] institutionalization of gender *difference* (McClintock 89). McClintock’s definition highlights power struggles that bifurcate gender as a means of maintaining control. Nancy Armstrong suggests that these systems depend on the “production of a particular form of consciousness that is at once unique and standardizing” (570). Thus, one can conclude that nations are contested spaces of political power connected based on institutionalized membership in a constructed identity.

However, this definition lacks a relationship to space and land, a crucial element of nation and, in particular, boundaries. Neil Evernden writes: “There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103). Just as the constructivist feminists argue for performative gender, Macdonald’s novel explores how human relationships to land have been constructed. Nature literature frequently illuminates varying degrees of human expectation, an idea of what nature should be or provide. Thus, nature has been imagined from varying perspectives, from wild to idyllic to pastoral to empty. Greg Garrad asks readers to understand wilderness tropes as part of the ideology brought by settlers. Their images of nature reflect Old World expectations brought to the New World, a search for the authentic, real nature. Through an omniscient narrator, Ann-Marie Macdonald writes in *The Way the Crow Flies*:

If you move around all your life, you can’t find where you come from on a map. All those places where you lived are just that: places. You



don't come from any of them; you come from a series of events. And those are mapped in memory. (36)

In these lines Macdonald's narration denies an implicit connection between land and people as an essential quality in the shaping of individual identity, instead citing experience as a crucial element to identity development. Contrasting this passage, Macdonald introduces readers to Madeleine McCarthy in the first section of the novel titled, "This Land is Your Land." Echoing a pop culture reference to an American folk singer, the title draws an ironic tie between Madeleine's family, whose military-induced transience challenges a definitive bond to a particular land, and the implicit suggestion of a shared bond between peoples nurtured in a common ownership of the land.

Through the perspective of military tradition and culture, the novel traces the development of the McCarthy family beginning in the Cold War era and continuing into 1960 and 70s counter-culture politics. Culturally, the 1950s reflects an era of strict binary codes: good/evil, Communist/Democratic, or West/East. These binaries speak to the limited definitions Macdonald's novel subverts. Historically, the novel exposes the ways in which Canadian nationalism became further entangled with the United States through the mediation of nuclear weapon technology. Macdonald frequently reminds readers of the tension and violence of modernity through passages that reflexively remark not only about war, but also about the ways liberal counter-cultures helped mask the damages:

Once upon a time, there were magic words that soothed us. *In defence [sic] of demoncracy. Just say no. Resolve. Freedom. Justice.*

We no longer liked the word *war* because it conjured up pictures of soldiers burning villages in order to save them. But *war* was potent if it was summoned against a concept or social condition. [...] Once there was a golden age. Post-war, green dream, people raised families and there was more than enough of everything to go around. People from all over the world came to find freedom, peace and prosperity. The Great Experiment worked. [...] This precious mess. Democracy. How much can be done in its name before, like an egg consumed by a snake, it becomes merely a shell? Once upon a time in the West. (636).

Macdonald confronts readers with the realities of nation development, particularly in terms of violence. Peace is the unrealized dream, democracy and its propaganda-like expressions have created a “precious mess,” a fragile shell threatening to shatter.

However, Jack McCarthy believes that the Americans are what stand between Canadians and Communism. He understands Canadian associations with Americans through Canadian involvement in global politics, particularly through its support of Great Britain in World War I and World War II. Yet he complains that the “jokers up on Parliament Hill [are] indulging in the lowest form of Canadian nationalism [...] Anti-Americanism” (238). The politics in the novel highlight the puzzling connection between Canada and the United States, what Robert Brum has called the “Great Canadian Identity Trap.” He argues that an equally compelling thesis and anti-thesis drives the Canadian people to both accept and reject their

affiliation with the United States. This ambivalent relationship has unified Canada as citizens continuously debate about who they are; Pierre Berton states: "No other country debates the way we do, and that is because of the presence of the [United] States."<sup>21</sup>

Though colonial ties as well as proximity to the United States have shaped Canadian peoples and histories, by and large the dominant metaphor for Canadian identity is cultural absence. Canada is a "blank space, either crippled by [its] lack of exciting and eccentric national symbols, traditions, and myths, or liberated by the absence of domineering master-narratives" (Baetz 64). Beneath this metaphor for absence is the notion that communal values, such as peace, order and good government, provide some type of distinction from the United States' openly rugged individualist support of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In her book *Survival*, Margaret Atwood contends that Canadians fear knowing who they are and like the mad poet stare desperately into a mirror. They search in vain for an image in literature to provide an answer to that question. Canada, she argues, is a place you "escape to from 'civilization', an unspoiled, uncorrupted place imagined as empty or thought of as populated by happy archaic peasants" (24). The breadth of Canada's physical space coupled with the diversity of its peoples leaves few "well-defined" national themes to answer the question, "Who am I?" Atwood's statement implies that nation is tied to the environment. She states: "Who am I? is a question appropriate in countries where the environment, the 'here,' is already well-defined, so well-defined in fact that it may threaten to overwhelm the individual" (24-25). As

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<sup>21</sup> Berton, Pierre. "Culture and National Identity". The Fraser Institute. 2/19/2010  
<<http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html>>.

in her previous novel, Macdonald tries to answer “Who am I?” within the contexts of the diasporas that comprise Canada. She examines the “imagined communities” to understand how ecological space helps maintain connections between people.

Furthermore, Macdonald offers a story in which the heroine’s struggles parallel those of a nation witnessing the ecological consequences of modernity, principally the creation of nuclear weaponry. Macdonald’s previous novel drew upon images of gardens not only to establish links between humanity and nature, but also to demonstrate how gender subjectivity is analogous to ecocritical concerns. In *The Way the Crow Flies*, Macdonald turns from a didactic viewpoint to a reflective stance to examine Madeleine’s resistance to prescribed definitions for gender as a rejection of domestication, an experience endemic of both gender and civilized environments.

Annette Kolodny states:

Colonization brought with it an inevitable paradox: the success of settlement depended on the ability to master the land, transforming the virgin territories into something else—a farm, a village, a road, a canal, a railway, a mine, a factory, a city, and finally an urban nation. (174)

Kolodny suggests that relationships to nature are as equally burdened by expectation and transformation as gender and racial identities. Women experience a similar process of transformation, accommodating fixed notions of gender which historically have aided in bolstering the “definitional apparatus”<sup>22</sup> of nationalism. This self-reflexive vocabulary, a vocabulary dependent upon women, the feminine, and figures of gender, is essential to symbolic movement of national ideologies and

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<sup>22</sup> Heng, Geraldine. “‘A Great Way to Fly’: Nationalism, the State, and the Varieties of Third-World Feminism.” *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Rivkin, Julie and Ryan, Michael. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 862.

anchors nationalist imaginary.<sup>23</sup> Macdonald's work resists binary definitions for gender, and subsequently for nation, and instead demonstrates that variable understandings will aid in healing the traumas of patriarchal wounds.

"This Land is Your Land": The Taming of the Wild

Situating garden and wilderness on opposite sides of a binary tension

Margaret Atwood writes:

What you are suppose [sic] to do with wildernesses, according to the Bible, is to somehow induce roses to blossom in them. Where have all the flowers gone? Away, usually. Venus makes few appearances in Canadian literature, and even for those she chooses odd incarnations.  
(245)

If metaphors for gardens connote lush fertility, agrarian egalitarianism, a pastoral-like idyll, then wilderness could play the Other<sup>24</sup> from which such a picture might be drawn. Themes for wilderness and wilderness writing evoke identification with rugged individuality, raw-edge survival, a more pure communion with nature and isolation to the point of creating insanity. Atwood implicitly contends that Christianity asks that followers reshape nature to fit a perspective of gender that demands women, especially, adopt specific culture. In literature this manifests as the "wild" child in need of civilization, the "wild" sea as naval adversary, or the "wild" earth in need of settlement. Wild rushing waters are tamed to civilized streams, supplying civilized populations electricity. Wild mountain passes are tamed with civilized roads, permitting civilized peoples to settle and/or pass through their daunting,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid 862.

<sup>24</sup> The term as it is used here has been inspired, primarily, by the work of Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said specifically used the term to distinguish the constructed differences between the West and the East.

rugged peaks. Wild forests are cleared for civilized agriculture, to feed civilized people. Domestication of the ecological spaces connotes power, man conquering nature. However, the landscape of colonial Canada presented an immense challenge to those desirous of maintaining this notion of controlling space.

Macdonald's *Fall on Your Knees* places readers in a small mining town off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada "near cutaway cliffs that curve over narrow rock beaches below, where the silver sea rolls and rolls, flattering the moon" (9). This rugged land offered little promise to those desirous of cultivating gardens. However, Macdonald's title for the first section of *The Way the Crow Flies*, "This land is *your* land" (emphasis mine 1), suggests a successful domestication. Canadian settlers have encouraged their land to nurture rose blossoms. It is no longer a wild land but one owned by humanity. The Canadian landscape has become nurtured by civilization to support farms, factories, roads, and cities. Macdonald text suggests that people have become domesticated as well. Like the land, the characters in the novel are subject to particular definitions of gender and are expected to produce (or reproduce) notions of masculinity or femininity. As the McCarthy's drive towards Centralia and their new duty station they "discover" Canada:

Outside the car windows the corn catches the sun, leafy stalks gleam in three greens. Arching oaks and elms line the curving highway, the land rolls and burgeons in a way that makes you believe that, yes, the earth is a woman, and her favourite [sic] food is corn. Tall and flexed and straining, emerald citizens. Fronds spiraling, cupping upward,

swaddling the tender ears, the gift-wrapped bounty. The edible sun.

The McCarthys have come home. To Canada. (6)

From this description the Canadian land has become *your* land, a land marked by civilized lines of trees and enclosed pastures. While the passage evokes images of nature, it underscores Atwood's notion of the ways in which Canadian landscape has induced roses to bloom, or in other words humans have pressed their own model for natural space into Canadian landscape.

According to Garrard, the value of humankind's relationship with wilderness is based on the construction of its authenticity, a purity that assures our reconnection to Eden. In other words, wilderness provides the vehicle through which we might reconnect to God. Garrard writes:

The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism. It is a construction of nature available to particular habitats and species, and is seen as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city. Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility. (59)

Garrard argues that wilderness narratives share the pastoral themes of escape and return; however, the construction of nature is distinct. The pastoral mode belongs to the Old World, a mode concurrent with long-settled, domesticated landscapes. The

wilderness mode belongs to the settlers of the New World, especially the United States, Canada, and Australia. However, settlers did not leave their perceptions behind: “the ‘nature’ they encountered was inevitably shaped by the histories they often sought to leave behind” (Garrard 60).

Undeniably, the metaphors for nature brought with the settlers did not fit the Canadian landscape, a theme Atwood states may be found throughout Canadian literature: “The key word is ‘distrusted’; Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature, they are always suspecting some dirty trick. An often-encountered sentiment is that Nature has betrayed expectation, it was supposed to be different” (59). Canadian colonization came at significance cost. Like the United States, settlers were ill-equipped to farm the territory and often faced drought, strong-winds, and poor crop production. Canadian settlements were dispersed throughout an immense territory making dependence upon the land a substantial part of survival. Traditional images of the garden failed to provide the necessary tools to cultivate Canadian space.

Macdonald’s first novel subverts these comfortable canonical images and instead asks readers to imagine the Canadian coastline of Nova Scotia with “Not many trees, thin grass” (9). New settlers faced a life encumbered by such realities as frigid temperatures, rocky soil, strong winds, and few trees. To assure the stability of their homes, settlers were forced to rope foundations into cliff-sides: “The silhouette of a colliery, iron tower against a slim pewter sky with cable and support sloping at forty-five-degree angles to the ground” (9). The rocky soil produced little and temperatures shortened growing seasons. The landscapes described in *The*



*Way the Crow Flies* sharply contrast with those of *Fall on Your Knees*: “The land is bursting, green and gold and bark. The stalks sway heavy with corn, slowing the breeze. The countryside reclines, abundant and proud like a mightily pregnant woman, lounging” (12-13). Modernity, and especially industrialization, has induced roses to bloom. No longer barren, Canada becomes like a pregnant woman, fertile and abundant. Neil Evernden argues that images such as this subjugate the Earth as nothing more than “fodder and feces to the consumer, in sharp contrast to the man who is in an environment in which he belongs and is of necessity a part” (99). Modernity’s taming of “wild” Canadian lands addresses a key contention in ecological perspective that demands humanity considers land not exclusively as a means of production. Though perhaps peaceful, the image of the pregnant woman suggests not only pragmatic reproduction, but also links femininity to the land and generates reductive implication that womanhood is also based on an ability to produce.

Furthermore, nature continues to be defined through binary oppositions. *The Way the Crow Flies* immediately sets up this tension with the chapter title, “This land is your land.” The possession of the land, the ownership, provides an implicit influence that allows citizens to civilize, enclose and farm. At the same time, pockets of “wildness” threaten to bleed into their civilization: “The birds saw the murder. Down below in the new grass, the tiny white bell-heads of the lily of the valley...Twig-crackling, early spring stirrings, spring soil smell...A stream through the nearby woods, so refreshing to the ear...The crows saw the murder” (2). Descriptions of Clair McCarroll’s murder become the refrain of the novel, each

repetition adding details, but always focused on the interaction between human and “wild” spaces. Though the scene appears peaceful, a space in which the savagery of the murder seems almost tranquil, as the novel continues wilderness becomes defined as the Other: the savage, uncivilized, uncontrollable beast, while the wheat fields, those scenes of tamed “nature” provide comfort to the members of the McCarthy family. For example, Madeleine’s mother Mimi feels comfortable when her daughter plays with the other children in the PMQ (Permanent Married Quarters), a place where there is a flagpole on each “regulation lawn” (11). The ultimate symbol of modern precision and discipline, the PMQ is what Mimi considers safe. Yet, Madeleine is not safe on base, and following her episodes of molestation she escapes to Rock Bass where the “grass looks real” and the “pebbles at the side of the road look real” (206). Though Madeleine draws consolation from her time in the forest, it does not arrest her fears entirely. Wilderness is a source of anxiety. Mr. March, Madeleine’s teacher, threatens as he rapes her:

‘Do you know what will happen if your parents find out what a bad child you have been?’

Her head is terribly hot. She shakes her head, no.

‘They’ll send you away.’ *Into the forest.* She feels her heart beat against her ribcage, sees it huge and red pulsing against the bars of bone.

Nature in this sense becomes unpredictable, incongruous with the expected relationship. Caroline McCarroll’s murder only confirms suspicions that humankind cannot trust nature.

Nature and wilderness are integral parts of Canadian identity: “the class sings [from the *Canadian Treasury of Song* book] ‘Land of the silver birch, home of the beaver, where still the mighty moose wanders at will’” (164). Madeleine McCarthy and her schoolmates must sing a song affirming their Canadian identity, an authentication of nationalism that is intricately tied to the landscape in which they live—wilderness. Though the song reaffirms national identity, it claims that the Canadian land is ‘home to the beaver’ and ‘mighty moose wanders at will,’ a suggestion that Canadians live harmoniously with nature. The key word, however, is ‘still’, which suggests humans made the choice to allow the creature to live (or provides a testament to nature’s resilience despite humanity’s best efforts to control it). According to Anne McClintock, nations by definition limit access to resources: “Nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize people’s access to the resources of the nation-state” (89). Nature has traditionally been excluded from such visions; however, ecological studies argue for more holistic visions of membership, and therefore study the interdependence and interconnectedness of *all* living systems: “Before the world was mechanized and industrialized, the metaphor that explained self, society and the cosmos was the image of organism” (Plant 214). The Canadian song implies communion, ignoring the actual relationship, a relationship of management and exploitation, between humans and nature.

Further complicating this conflation of wild/tame, natural/unnatural space is the fact that Canada and its landscape are in political purgatory. Although by the 1960s Canada had established independence, political links to the British

Commonwealth remained intact. Canada, at this point, is neither a colonial territory, not is it post-colonial nation. Though the economic resources changed, the concept of governance did not. If nature is the Other, Canada, too, must be acknowledged as occupying a similar space; its citizens locked into a subservient relationship with the British Empire, which Madeleine McCarthy sees but does not understand:

Not our flag, precisely, but the Red Ensign: the Canadian coat of arms, and in the upper left corner, the Union Jack. Canada does not have an official flag, we are not officially a country, we are just a dominion.

What is a dominion? We're not sure. It's the name of a grocery store chain. (34)

Macdonald alludes to the continued British presence, the lack of a defined Canadian-ness. As a dominion, Canada remained under the influence of the British Empire, semi-autonomous. Consequently, while Canadian peoples work to tame the wild nature of their lands (managing farms, building neighborhoods with specific structures and landscaping, or exhuming mineral supplies to build bombs), they too continue being tamed as part of greater Empire, a detail linking Jack to his country. Both are stymied by their responsibilities: "But nowadays there is no such thing as 'out of range.' Global village...Meanwhile, Canada's defenses have not been activated. Jack's hands are tied. His own government has decided that Jack's children don't need to be defended" (203). Jack understands that even though he is a member of the Armed Forces, his government cannot and does not have the political freedom to interact equally in world politics. Ultimately, he is never able to reclaim an identity outside of this system and even his son is forced to maintain this

role. Only Madeleine is able to realize an identity outside of traditional male/female, colonizer/colonized binaries. Jack's membership in the global community is based on a system of reciprocity developed out of imperial policies that lead to mass exploration, settlement, and, more importantly, the rape of the "new" world's resources.

Ecocriticism and postcolonialism are approaches that "firmly situate their analyses in the historical context from which specific mechanisms of exploitation have evolved, and both are inextricably linked to social and political activism" (517) according to Christine Gerhardt. Gerhardt believes that the exploitation of land and people, as well as the political advocacy necessary to change the status quo, invites comparison. Furthermore, she contends that the subject position is always defined by two systems of otherness: human vs. nature and colonizer vs. colonized (519). Her argument implies that in order to become a member of the human community, one must be willing to subjugate nature. Thus, escaping binary hierarchies seems impossible. Accordingly, Canadian landscape and peoples are bound by the same threads that maintain a definitive hierarchy and constructed relationship between land and people and people and people. Jack McCarthy serves his country and the British Empire not only as a military officer, but also in taking part in the subterfuge that aids in the United States/Canadian/British acquisition of nuclear warfare technology, a priceless Cold War commodity, but he will always be the Other to his British and American counterparts. Jack is not the only man who will continue such subservience to the hierarchy. Henry Froelich, Jack McCarthy's neighbor, escapes Nazi Germany and the concentration camps only to have to serve a different order

for the sake of his family; he will always be the Other in Canada, barred entrance by his religion, his tattoo, and most of all his “unnatural” family of adopted children. Ultimately, however, the physical landscape of Canada, the Earth, remains deferential to all, the ultimate Other, providing resources needed to construct those important divisions; the binary space of us and them. Post-modern and post-industrial economies depend upon the “expeditious transformation of goods into waste (thereby enabling the quick purchase of replacement goods), we have come to see in our garbage parts of ourselves, of our personal histories” (Deitering 198). Froelich echoes this sentiment as he describes Peenemünde, a weapons development plant in Germany.

‘Once upon a time there was a mountain cave. And inside the cave was a treasure.’ There was a glint in Froelich’s eye. Jack waits...’You see Jack, it is a fact that only the bowels of the earth can provide us with the means to propel ourselves toward the sun. Someone has to forge the arrows of Apollo...Which one of God’s angels is rich enough, do you think, to pay for our dream to fly so high we may glimpse perhaps the face of God?’ (95)

Henry Froelich’s candid metaphors acknowledge not only the economic value attached to the arms race, but also the very real environmental necessities. Froelich’s “treasure” is none other than the world’s poison that will eventually be released into test sites in the Southwest of the United States and Japan. It is the “treasure” that will help measure very real world boundaries as part of the Cold War leader’s efforts to divide the world into “us” and “them,” the wild and the tame.

Macdonald's work pushes audiences to examine the constructed boundaries. The text's narrator comments about the ways authentic nature, the Earth, has been "tamed" to produce nuclear weapons; nuclear weapons that destroy both physically and ideologically. The constructed images of nature and nationalism beg consideration of the patriarchal efforts to hide the reality of toxic history that has continued to force separation and difference onto people and land.

These histories have traditionally favored men's war stories, men's Truths, but it is Madeleine who is equally scarred. As Mr. March rapes her, Madeleine watches his cheeks jiggle and "he stares at her but it's as if he were looking at nobody at all" (169). Mr. March negates her presence, and subsequently her history by manipulating her fears. He not only physically rapes Madeleine, but symbolically rapes Canada: "Where is Madeleine? The man is touching her freshly ironed blouse; it has a brooch of the Acadian flag, white red and blue, Maman pinned it there this morning, poor Maman" (169). David Spurr writes: "Colonial domination [...] is seen to have beneficial, cathartic effect, like the dash of cold water in the face of the woman who has lost her senses" (172). Spurr exploration of sexual transgressions, as well as sexualized media representations of women, demonstrates one of the ways patriarchy has maintained control over both women and colonies. "Allegorization of colonized nations in terms of the female *figure* (bodily, rhetorical) [have become] a cliché of colonial history," states Spurr (171). As women have become symbolically representative of land and nation, Mr. March's rape becomes a violation of Canada: its land and its people.

Connecting to God through nature (and the feminine figure) carries a cost, seemingly leveled on those who can least afford it. Froelich asks which of God's angels will be rich enough to pay for humankind's desire to glimpse the face of God, echoes Garrad's earlier comments stating that authentic relationships with nature provide reconnection to God. Instead of reconnection with God through a spiritual sense of celebrating His creation, Froelich celebrates the discovery of a mineral powerful enough to destroy and poison millions of peoples. The glimpse of God to which he refers does not rejoice in life, but revels in death. Macdonald's work demands that audiences ask: what is natural? It demands that audiences consider the 'waste' that defines both their relationship to land and people. Is it natural to utilize the elements found in nature to create nuclear weapons? Do the components divorce their natural state once manipulated into the destructive force, or do they still remain connected if only because they defy, if only a little, complete control? Froelich's statement reveals the power behind such a deconstruction, clarifying the horrific potential in such a warped relationship. Later the narrator states:

The evidence shows that the rocket was launched from Cape Canaveral, but the story tells us that it was fired where it was forged, deep within the earth—illuminating a giant grotto, its ceiling lost in shadow, its floor littered with bones and rust, embedded with the vertebrae of train tracks.

And that when it rose, clean and white, to breach the mouth of the mountain cave, it trailed flames and blood and soil as it flew all the way to the moon. (519)



The rocket symbolizes a warped taming of nature, a civilization that attempts to take not only the present from the earth, but also future possibilities. Macdonald destabilizes notions of binary space (natural/unnatural), subverting the ethical simplicities fiercely governed by nationalist's patriarchal rhetoric of separation and dominance. The narrator's descriptions marry humankind to Earth, the "floor littered with bones *and rust*," the train tracks "embedded with vertebrae," and ultimately show how the cost of national warfare is imposed on all. Macdonald demands that readers look beyond the "shadows," and reminds readers to consider relationships between land and people outside of modern metaphors of violence and trauma.

Macdonald further advances the theme in the Claire McCarroll death scenes. Though readers are widely unaware of the victim's identity throughout the novel, her murder scene is always entwined with "natural" landscapes. These scenes contemplate "wildness," particularly as a medium for trauma:

Rex found her. She was in a field beyond the ravine at Rock Bass, halfway between the cornfield and the woods. German shepherds are natural trackers. On her back, beneath a criss-cross of last year's bulrushes, clumps of bluebells, wildflowers, April showers. Hairband not askew. Eyes closed. Eyes do not naturally close in death by strangulation. There is nothing peaceful or natural about the faces of people who have died that way. (292)

Macdonald's arguably purposeful repetition of the word "natural" in this brief passage serves to displace that which the word commonly suggests. Situating Claire's murder against the wildness of Canadian landscape identifies the space as an

accomplice. It is in the woods, the untamed wilderness, where the murder occurs, as if to suggest that sterile urban centers connote safety. Instead of discovering Garrad's "authentic communion" with nature, Macdonald offers a disturbing glimpse that, though suggesting communion of sorts, is haunted by the stain of purpose for such a communion. Even before the discovery of Claire, Mimi McCarthy expresses her discomfort with the woods, particularly her association with Colleen Froelich. Claire's mother "would not let her enter the woods" (346). The scene plays with natural and unnatural descriptions, natural and unnatural conclusions, reminding audiences that categorization cannot be absolute. Though Rex, the German shepherd, is a natural tracker, it is far from natural for him to track the deceased body of a human child.

Claire's death not only challenges perceived notions of a 'natural communion' with landscape, but also incorporates Macdonald's challenge issued to the nationalistic fervor and socio-political intrigues that attempt to divide the world. Claire's father arrives at the Canadian air force base as an attaché for the United States Air Force; however, he is also a spy attempting to negotiate the acquisition of a former Nazi soldier who helped construct nuclear weapons in Germany. Henry Froelich remembers Oskar Fried from Dora, the concentration camp where he was imprisoned. The government "turned a blind eye, and in some cases recruited such men as immigrants—for whatever else these men are they are not Communists" (300). Claire's death blurs the stories of three families and demonstrates collusion between post-colonial, ecological, and feminist perspectives. Post-colonial perspectives understand the challenge of Canadian pluralism that, in reality, denies

access to Henry Froelich's family, and shifts the blame for Claire's murder to his son Ricky, a First Nation métis. Post-colonial perspectives suggest Canada will never be able to move into independent politics; they will forever be like Jack McCarthy—locked into the subservience of the past with his “hands tied” (203). Feminist perspectives understand women as locked in private battles of expectation that lead not only to inequitable relationships, but also leave them vulnerable to criminal depredation. Ecological perspectives demand consideration of technological innovations that have enslaved generations and excavated the Earth for the dual purpose hoarding both knowledge and power.

Post-colonial, feminist and ecological concerns overlap throughout the text elucidating systemic projects of hierarchal dominance. It is impossible to ignore the continuous battle Jack faces in trying to discover his relationship as a Canadian to global, and specifically American, politics. After retiring from the military, he reads *The Globe and Mail*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, *The Times of London*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Sunday New York Times*. He reads stories about a senior American Army officer arrested for selling weapons and secrets to Russians. He reads about a high school hockey hero who gives up the sport for American football, “An overrated game. An American game” (522). He reads about terrorists who try to force independence for Québec, and instigate Prime Minister Trudeau's War Measures Act, “suspending Canadian civil liberties” (523). Jack's battle to understand the political implications for Canadian identity is analogous to Madeleine's struggles to accommodate her gender. Just as her father has an almost suspended national identity, Madeleine's understanding of her gender is

equally stymied. Shadowing these anxieties, the novel ends with a scene of uneasy reminiscence:

An air-raid siren is a beam of sound more terrifying than any other. [...] Birds were flying, the fields were buzzing [...] The siren screams over wading pools and backyard barbeques, it says, I was here all along, you knew this could happen. [...] It is everywhere—it makes all places into the same place, turns everyone into the same person. It says, Run [...] because you are alive and an animal. [...] Crows. Who knew the old siren was operational after all these years? Municipal workers [...] climb the pole to clear away the nest and remove the siren altogether. [...] the shiny things that crows collect. [...] a tiny silver charm. A name. *Claire*. (713).

The implicit message of the passage links Claire to the threat of nuclear war, a pairing of feminist and ecological concerns. Ultimately Macdonald considers how histories silence the traumas enacted on both land and women to realize modernity. The siren's scream reminds the town of possibilities, specifically suggesting that toxic pollution has the power to erase difference. The bomb makes place and people the same. It makes people and animals the same. Our garbage will become part of ourselves, "our personal histories [where] the Real is now represented not as the standing-reserve but as the already-used-up" (Dietering 198-99).

Systemically these resolutions deny women access to socio-political resources. Jack and Henry have some kind of freedom, a freedom still managed by hierarchies, but a freedom nonetheless. Madeleine and her mother, Mimi—and, in

fact, the women in the novel generally—will rarely realize this type of freedom without mimicry. Macdonald, skillfully perforating these realities, asks readers to think about the truths that sustain modernity:

[...] we lost interest in the moon. We have some difficulty now in looking up to her for inspiration, or for confirmation at the moment of a kiss, because, after all, we've been there. We've had her. She put out. We think we know all about her, we think we know how NASA did it. How Apollo, the sun god got to her. The price of rockets is the account of how they were born, not simply of how they flew to the moon. Until we listen to this story we have not paid the Piper. We were suppose [sic] to think it all began with NASA. But it began with the Nazis. (519)

Our truths, according to Macdonald, demand that we look at technology in terms of rape, in terms of a disinterested lover, in terms of costs not yet levied and debts not settled. Susie O'Brien reiterates these concerns, worried that 'world' literary theories will sacrifice histories just as hegemonic discourse has erased histories:

The danger as I see it, in the attempt to merge the concerns of ecocriticism and postcolonialism in a new "world" literary theory, is that the ethical commitment of both to the articulation of complexity—of expression, of culture, of communication, of life—will be sacrificed to the compulsion towards economic and/or aesthetic resolution and conquest (154).

O'Brien contends that the motivation to hitch these two perspectives would be destabilized by competing world views as well as by founding humanist principals. *The Way the Crow Flies* offers tentative hope through Macdonald's notions of pluralism. As the novel demonstrates, Canadian landscape—and, in fact, Canadian identity—must be rural and urban, wild and tame. Macdonald's conclusions do not ask for reestablishment of binary division, but rather inclusion, a bio-diversity that acknowledges multiplicity of peoples and places. Macdonald asks that readers see themselves as part of nature, not separated from it. Perhaps that is the only way that what Macdonald calls "The Great Experiment" will work, the only way to realize her vision of an imagined contemporary world where "Never have so many lived so peacefully, never has so much diversity thrived, never has dissent bred so much opportunity...Once upon a time in the West" (636).

#### "Through the looking glass": Taming of the Shrews

Eco-feminists, those feminists who identify the "anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature as the ultimate source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices" but also blame the "androcentric dualism man/woman" (Garra 23), argue that both the earth and women have suffered under the model of dominion that subjects them to male mastery. Eco-feminism attempts to destabilize societal efforts to link women and earth by celebrating such a connection. Exultation of earth, they reason, equals exultation of women. Karen Warren provides a broader definition,

'Ecological feminism' is an umbrella term which captures a variety of multicultural perspectives on the nature of the connections *within* social systems of domination between those humans in subdominant or

subordinate positions, particularly women, and the domination of nonhuman nature (1).

Following Warren's contentions, eco-feminism unites feminism and ecological studies, as well as the world's cultures, to provide a unique framework from which to examine the ways in which the social systems have subjugated certain groups, both human and non-human. This bond between women and the environment is so strong, according to Warren, it surpasses all sense of cultural, national, generational, racial, or social difference. Warren proposes that "any feminism which is not informed by ecological insights, especially women-nature insights, and any environmental philosophy which is not informed by ecofeminist insights is simply inadequate" (2). Warren would entwine the two perspectives so closely that one could not and should not be separated from the other.

The failure in Warren's argument, or those of other eco-feminists such as Valerie Plumwood, results from their over-generalized definitions for feminine space. Ignoring issues of race, class, culture, or nation does not provide as much of a sense of a united feminist front, but instead homogenizes oppression, in a sense reducing some experiences and heightening others to create some kind of level ground. Victoria Davion acknowledges the important work performed in Warren's and Plumwood's work constructing the "logic of dominion:" however, she counters that "to embrace the feminine side of gender dichotomy uncritically is not a truly feminist solution to the problem...They fail to notice that femininity may itself be a byproduct of patriarchy" (17). Davion contends, like the constructivists, that femininity could simply be a result of social taboos. If gender is constructed, then

creating a bond between nature and females such as some eco-feminists have done simply reifies the logic of dominion with females at the top of the hierarchy. Eco-feminism, therefore, creates an artificial bond between women and the earth, a constructed meaning based upon certain assumptions held concerning the female body and space. It begins to raise the question: what is natural and what is unnatural?

Expectations that consider what space might be designated as “authentic” nature have lead to endless significations, and mystification of the environment, particularly those aspects not easily accommodated by scientific explanation. Like Said’s explanation for the Eastern citizen’s perceived permanent inferiority, nature has its own binaries: natural/unnatural, human/nature. These codifications can be informed by Judith Butler’s concept of the social temporality of gender, where “gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, [...] the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief” (901). Butler argues that gender qualities merely reflect a performance, a reenactment of gendered qualities that frantically work to maintain status quo. Like wilderness, people must be civilized; they must be constructed to fit into definitions of gender identity. “Naturalness” is a purely perfunctory action that reaffirms patriarchal inscription. Just as the Canadian landscape was pressed by the civilized hand of settlers, so too are young women pressed into molds: Mimi McCarthy tells her



daughter that a “lady is not fully dressed without a girdle” (187). For Madeleine, Mimi epitomizes woman:

She’s in stockings and pumps, never slippers after five, the stings of her apron go round her waist twice...Mimi has supper on the stove, every hair in place, and she’s put away under the sink the old maternity dress and rubber gloves that she wore to scrub the floor. Clark Kent changes in a phone booth. Superwomen are more discreet” (139).

Mimi reaffirms her sexuality in every way possible, through clothing, manner, and thought. Madeleine represents “wilderness” in need of taming. She must learn to wear the appropriate clothing, the “domestic science” of shaving, stocking, soft skin, and scratchy bras, of hiding, of subjugation. This act of becoming a woman forces girls to “compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project” (Butler 902). Macdonald’s work visualizes these “delimitations” while her work pushes for wider definitions, definitions that view nature not as civilized versus uncivilized, but rather as a living, mutable system.

The problem with concepts of nature is that what becomes natural often reflects a construction and then becomes burdened by expectation. For example, Madeleine wears the patent leather shoes and the dresses that are appropriate “costumes” for a young girl, the “flowered [bed]spread and her frilly pillowcase” (211). Readers may expect her to be like Claire, the little girl who is not to go into the forest, and would not scuff her shoes or behave in an “unladylike” manner, but

Madeleine “looks down at her muddy bare feet, her streaked dress, blackened hands [and] discovers speckles of mud on her face” (211). With the label girl, boy, natural, unnatural, come expectations that have been constructed from cultural definitions binding normalcy to homogenized characteristics to include gender, race, and the environment. Nature, having become defined by those expectations, assumptions and requirements is no longer natural “authentic” nature, but rather a representation of human control and desire. Yet people continually seek authentic experiences with nature (the exploration of the wild), and in turn set up the binary system that leads to the need for their search. Claire McCarroll goes looking for connection, looking for the elusive blue bird’s egg, and instead she is raped and murdered. Conversely, Madeleine’s relationship with nature is more dialectical: “Now she is safely outside, with the soft aroma of rain and worms” (246).

Gender identity suffers a similar repetitive mania, where the inherent natural quality ascribed to biological difference leads to assumptions that posit such difference. Authentic femininity is just as elusive as authentic nature, both suffering from binary hierarchies that limit possibilities. The elusive authentic female is less a reality and more a testament to patriarchal power that conditionally validates femininity to reaffirm dominance. Mimi’s apparent perfection must be constantly maintained and repeated, but most importantly her performance is so convincing that she becomes an almost nameless image of femininity.

Look at what she’s got on underneath. White but perfect, the right amount of lace, the right amount of everything. [...] She is every girlfriend, every picture in every men’s magazine—he’s fast and she

wants it that way—she is the woman who seduces you from an open care and doesn't ask your name, the one you can forget you love or even know—[...] she has your children, she always wants you.” (330-31)

Debate concerning essential versus constructed identity has divided feminist scholars into two camps. The argument dividing the scholars speaks to the qualities that determine a particular gender. Simply put, is a woman a woman because of biological traits—implying a natural, essential femininity—or is a woman a woman because of social constructions that provide instruction in femininity? The essentialists refer to the work of Nancy Chodorow, Carol Gilligan, and French philosopher Luce Irigaray who argue that basic biological differences between men and women create difference. Such physical differences that permit birth, menstruation, and lactation distinguish the female space as a space of creation, opposed to the masculine space of the rational world. Essentialists argue that men think in terms of rights, while women think with a greater responsibility to others.

Early in the novel, audiences discover the main character Madeleine McCarthy questioning gender roles and, subsequently, the concept of essentialized femininity. She believes “It is also a characteristic of mothers that they don't mind eating their child's soggy ice cream cone” (8). Motherhood, according to Madeleine, is natural. Her thoughts do not imply her own mother as having learned to eat soggy ice cream cones. According to Madeleine, motherhood changes your identity, your likes and dislikes. Motherhood, however, can only be attributed to feminine identity, and thus Madeleine's thoughts agree with the essentialists' argument concerning

women's regard for responsibility to others. Mimi, Madeleine's mother, models natural femininity from her acceptance of soggy ice cream cones to her perfect kitchen: "Mimi's kitchen—indeed her house is model of organization...inscribed according to her own arcane code" (67). Her style displays perfect femininity: "Her red sleeveless blouse is tuned up at the collar, her black Capri pants reveal just the right amount of leg between the hem and espadrille" (83). To avoid this identity Madeleine "plans never to have babies, never to marry. She intends to live with her brother and never become doughy and moist" (49). Thus, Madeleine will avoid her mother's definition of femininity if she does not become a mother. Ironically, Madeleine constructs her femininity, denying the biological component that essentially characterizes the female gender. Madeleine wants to remain un-civilized (or rather she wishes to avoid limited definitions for gender), untamed by the constraints that accompany both motherhood and adult femininity. Yet, according to essentialists, Madeleine's rejection is tantamount to a rejection of her entire gender.

Many feminists are highly critical of assigning essential qualities to gender, hesitant to assign characteristics to all women. Catriona Sandilands' pointed critique questions what "coherent list of attributes does [the term woman] describe that is not part of the patriarchal narratives through which it was constructed" (20)? Questions concerning biological differences, such as the loss of breasts, the absence of menstruation, or the inability to conceive, debunk a femininity based on corporeal functions. Beyond biological questions, constructivists have opposed essential feminist arguments preferring to attribute gender difference to patriarchal conditioning that facilitates social construction. Constructivists use the work of

Judith Butler to support their claim that “what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo” (Butler 901). Constructivists argue that gender operates through mimesis, a repetitive performance that utilizes the social clues to determine mores and sanctions that create the representation of femininity or masculinity. This performance constantly reaffirms representations of naturalized sexuality, natural appearance that may belie biological and/or conscious desires to act otherwise. Men and women are therefore agents of social construction, reproducing heterosexual normalcy. Constructivists would draw attention to the descriptions of the first day of school where: “St. Lawrence Avenue is full of kids in new clothes—cotton dresses and ankle socks for the girls, plaid shirts and high-top sneakers for the boys—all freshly ironed, barbered, braided and brushed” (121). They would emphasize the gender expectations drawn from Mimi’s statement: “boys do not babysit. What kind of a mother would volunteer her son for a girl’s job” (92)? Moments such as these point to the ways in which the text reflects gender as a social construction. Mimi’s comment demonstrates another level of gender inscription, arguing that there are certain jobs for girls and others for boys. The children dress according to the codes ascribed by gender, dresses for girls and sneakers for boys. Though this kind of performance suggests the identities and roles are essential, Madeleine’s character clarifies that broader definitions for gender are necessary. Madeleine continues to resist expectations for definitions of gender identity. Though she wears the required “uniform” she “carries her white cardigan hooked by a finger over her shoulder—this is a less sissy way of carrying a cardigan, it’s the way you would carry a bomber

jacket if you had one” (120). Madeleine incorporates elements from male and female identities: she shaves with her father, wears her cardigan like her brother, dresses and speaks like her mother, in an attempt to construct her own identity.

Macdonald provides audiences with either/or tensions throughout the novel. In bed Jack and Mimi read: “His: *Since last October, the U.S. has boosted its force of military advisers to more than 10,000 and is now spending \$1,000,000 daily to beat the Viet Cong...* Hers: *Thnaksgiving recipes your family will love*” (173). Men and women occupy different space, the women of PMQ’s wash windows and sign their children up for after school activities in the waning weeks of October, while the men put up storm windows and put on snow tires. This space is not only emotional, but also physical. Women stand in kitchens, men in offices or outdoors. Madeleine is a “scullery maid.”<sup>25</sup> Mimi plays bridge with her friends where they “exchange trade secrets, and among them the exact nature of their housework clothes—ugly old maternity tops, diaper bandanas, and ragbag slippers, the shock their husbands would get if they ever caught them like that” (201). Madeleine knows there are places for girls and places for boys:

Madeleine knows that no girls are allowed here. No women either.

They will cook the meat and serve it, but it is not decent for females to be out here. [...] it’s not decent for an older girl or a woman to go into a barbershop. Never mind a tavern. Those are men’s places. [...] This backyard has become a man’s place. (267)

She demands to know why she must make the tea, and her mother responds that her brother is a boy, “He has other jobs” (333).

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<sup>25</sup> Macdonald 191.

Thus, one of the defining moments of the novel comes when Madeleine pushes these boundaries, pushes the definitions for men and women to be with nature. Madeleine's friendship with Colleen Froelich defies her mother's demands for a constructed young lady. Colleen swears, spits, climbs trees, and spends her days deep in the wildness of Canadian landscape. Colleen's seemingly inherent connection to the landscape could be attributed to her ancestry; she is Native American, though both she and her brother lack specific lineage (such as knowing even whether their family is from Canada or the United States). Thus, Colleen represents the collusion of difference, that space in which gender, politics and nature interact pulling Madeleine outside of normative definitions of gender and behavior to provide her moments where she can consider broader notions of identity. In fact, the Froelich family is a microsm for such collusion.

The Froelich family is an array of adopted children, the first challenge to natural versus unnatural constructions. One of their children, Elizabeth, has cerebral palsy:

At first sight it made her queasy, the way things like that can. Crutches and leg braces. Strange twisty people in wheelchairs you feel guilty and grateful not to be them or to be in an iron lung (49).

Her arms seem to be in constant slow motion—as though she were under water. A shawl covers her legs despite the warm weather, and Madeleine can see the tips of her narrow feet in white sandals, one crossed over the other. She is strapped in by a seat belt...her wrist looks permanently bent, her hand clumsily closed (68).

Elizabeth is an 'unnatural' child, from her 'strange twisty legs' to her wheelchair, to her drool and barely distinguishable speech, yet it is Colleen and her brother Ricky, the 'natural' children who care for her. Henry and his wife escaped the German construction of natural versus unnatural—Germans versus Jews—of the Dora concentration camp to resettle in Canada. Though Henry may appear to be the 'natural' man, his wife does not fit her constructed role so nicely; her house is messy and she wears "a man's old white shirt, faded black stirrup pants...There are grass stains on the woman's sneakers" (82). Henry Froelich's family defies the tidy boundaries that bind each military home and family to expectations for behavior and dress. Difference, despite the political propaganda professing multicultural tolerance, inspired fear. Canada's membership in the Commonwealth enabled citizens to emigrate from such nations as India, Australia, and the West Indies, and thus should have guaranteed some greater levels of progressive accommodation. Though histories have purposely worked to tear down barriers between cultures, this project demonstrated that "middle-class hegemony succeeded in part because it constructed separate historical narratives for self and society, family and factory, literature and history" (Armstrong 568). John Fiske states that culture is "political" and is not the "aesthetic products of human spirit [...] but rather a way of living within an industrial society that encompasses all the meanings of that social experience" (1268). Socio-political missions co-opt the terms like 'multiculturalism' as a means of simultaneously removing specific types of difference (that difference that does not fit within the national hegemony) while maintaining distinction through the suggestion of "multiple" cultures. However, Macdonald questions liberal appropriation of



multiculturalism, exacting harsh criticism for the realities that led to Ricky Froelich's false incarnation. Ultimately, this organic family is not permitted to survive.

Macdonald provides other examples of such 'unnatural' women as well. Marjorie lies to create a fantasy world where her father does not hit and her mother makes her lunch with cupcakes and sandwiches with the crusts cut off. Grace Novotny sucks on her knuckles until they are raw and bleeding, smells of urine and talks like a baby. These are the girls with whom Mimi encourages Madeleine to associate, not Colleen. Macdonald carefully reflects these images, these constructed realities that presuppose what femininity should look like, demanding that readers look at the warped connection between 'natural' and 'unnatural' dichotomies. The only young girl that truly fits Mimi's definition of womanhood is Claire McCarroll: pristine, perfect, quiet, submissive; she models the constructed womanhood Mimi advances. Macdonald shatters the illusion of constructed realities with Claire's death. Claire's death marks Macdonald's most powerful argument, as her death not only binds the characters' stories, but also demonstrates the ultimate fallibility of a reality based on illusions. In the end, it is not Elizabeth, the child with cerebral palsy, who is unnatural—it is Claire.

Claire does not belong: from her intense beauty to her immature attempts to explore the woods for a bird's egg, she represents the possibility for short distance between similarity and difference that highlights Macdonald's exploration of diversity. Sadly, Claire's family never seemed suited for this duty station and her father "doesn't even know why he was posted to Centralia" (Macdonald 370). Claire's presence in Centralia is far from decisive intent; her family is moved to Canada to

attempt to steal post-World War II technology for the United States. The McCarrolls represent America, the illusion of sameness:

Mr. McCarroll resembled all the other dads in Centralia, but if you looked closely at the badge on his air force hat you would see an eagle with outspread wings [...] his uniform was a deeper blue [...] and when he moved, the weave imparted a gray sheen.” (150)

Claire, too, is both similar and different. Her baby blue dress and ankle socks are not unlike her classmates, but on her arm she carries a “Frankie and Annette lunchbox suspended on her wrist like a purse” (150). Ironically, Sharon McCarroll’s shyness, her soft-spoken nature, makes the other base wives “feel...American” (151). Claire stirs empathy in Madeleine. Her ethereal beauty and naïve innocence lead Madeleine to try to protect Claire from Mr. March’s after-school machinations. Sitting on the swing Madeleine surmises that Claire is stupid and if she “hadn’t been picked Madeleine would not feel so guilty now. Like Adam and Eve when God banished them from the Garden of Eden. *And they knew they were naked*” (259). Madeleine clearly acknowledges Claire’s innocence, as well as draws an important connection between her and the Fall of Man. Claire’s innocence becomes a conduit for the loss of Eden, a particularly important observation considering her national identity. In this passage America, too, is implicated as naïve and complicit in separating humanity from paradise.

In fact, many of the comparisons Macdonald makes throughout the novel become a source of dissonance. For example, as quoted earlier, Macdonald compares landing on the moon to a rape. Macdonald’s analogy of technological

“rape” of the earth and the solar system simultaneously echoes the rape of Mr. March’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grade girls. While Jack McCarthy scurries to assure the safety of Oskar Fried, his daughter tries desperately to do the same for herself and her father. While Jack bemoans his impotence, Madeleine learns warfare propaganda juxtaposed with the sexual abuse of Mr. March. The children must watch the film strip where Bert the turtle demonstrates the effective strategy of ‘duck and cover’; however, Madeleine must stay after school and practice ‘duck and cover’ “under his big oak desk, ‘which is bound to provide more shelter in the event of an air raid’”(202). In these scenes Macdonald links female trauma to “natural” matter. Madeleine’s safety is guaranteed by the “natural” oak desk and the “natural” defensive mechanisms of a turtle. These scenes matching natural to unnatural not only question our assumptions about unspoiled nature, but also defy the easy constructions that have helped built the social relations and selfhoods that are understood as systems of “social power [...] in terms of structure[s] of dominance and subordination that is never static but is always the site of contestation and struggle” (Fiske 1268).

Macdonald pushes readers to deconstruct images of femininity and masculinity to examine the dangers of expectation, particularly in terms of myopic definitions that limit possibilities for identity. Nature scenes develop Macdonald’s pluralist spirit, a reality that acknowledges the complexity of the relationship between humans and their environment. Scenes such as Madeleine’s escape into the “wilderness” after Mr. March, her teacher, rapes her or Madeleine and Colleen’s after-school forays into the Rock Bass or even Ricky Froelich’s daily runs with his sister along the country road, pushing her wheelchair, Rex running alongside

provide answer to the traumas addressed throughout the novel. Madeleine and the other girls in Mr. March's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class suffer prolonged sexual abuse; he is a man and can subjugate the young women. He has the power in the hierarchy. Just as the environment has been violated by the rape of the Earth for resources to fuel missiles, women have been violated by the rape of males searching for resources to fuel other types of power relationships. Macdonald's novel contends that multiplicity, biodiversity, and, most important, a unity based on mutual respect will heal these wrongs.

For Macdonald, this communion is written into scenes of Madeleine's relationship with Colleen Froelich. Colleen's life "began again in an orphanage" (399). Her memory survived as imagination, and she even forgot that she had a brother (Ricky Froelich). The orphanage provides a new name, a new identity, a white identity. She "perhaps [...] had an Indian name and they'd changed it when she arrived; that was what happened to many of the children there" (399). Colleen's experience refers to the assimilation of First Nations people, specifically the Métis. She is adopted by the Froelichs, German Jews, and speaks a version of French that few understand. She represents difference, particularly as an instrument for helping Madeleine realize notions of gender outside of prescribed definitions. Colleen, and more generally her family, represents the diversity Macdonald argues will ensure survival. As an adult Madeleine begins healing, slowly comprehending the traumas inflicted by Mr. March as one of the reasons for her continued partnership with an abusive lover. Madeleine does not begin to repair the transgressions of her past until she visits Colleen, returning to Canadian the wilderness: "Colleen unlocks the

gate and holds out her hand to Madeleine, palm up. There is the scar. Madeleine takes her hand and squeezes it, then lets go and follows her friend along the dog runs, hands out for licks and pats, wet teeth grazing her flesh" (712). Madeleine begins her reconciliation with history in these brief moments. She is no longer the child who is slowly dying:

Sexual violation turns all children into the same child. [...] Children heal quickly, so that, like a tree growing up around an axe, the child grows up healthy until, with time, the embedded thing begins to rust and seep and the idea of extracting it is worse than the thought of dying from it slowly. [...] Once pleasure and poison have entwined, how to separate them? (618)

Madeleine's recovery depends not only on her incorporation of childhood poison, childhood trauma, but also her ability to feel comfortable asserting her individual notions of gender. Her communion manifests as recognition of self, of her history, and, in the end, nature alongside her blood-sister Colleen. Ultimately, the novel provides harmony when it realizes greater definitions for identity.

#### "What Remains": Parting Thoughts

Macdonald's story juxtaposes the struggles of Jack and Madeleine McCarthy to challenge the subjugation of female space. Rather than subverting patriarchal models that marginalize women, Macdonald elevates feminist concerns and provides a story where sexual abuse is equivocal to battle. Through these competing narratives for Earth, gender, and national identity, Macdonald demonstrates the similar constructive qualities each shares. Relationships to nature

are as equally burdened by expectations as gender and racial identities. These constructed relationships forcibly subjugate people and land, as well as participate in the silencing of histories that challenge narratives of easy multiculturalism. As Paul Gilroy states, "The problems have multiplied where the idea of culture has been abused by being simplified, instrumentalized, or trivialized, and particularly being coupled with notions of identity and belonging that are overly fixed or too easily naturalized as exclusively national phenomena" (5). Macdonald's complex stories challenge notions of "simplified" culture, denying any implicit naturalization. Furthermore she rewrites traditionally masculine space to encourage audiences to redefine gender and the environment, to encourage a pluralism where either/or gender identification is no longer necessary. In the end, Madeleine must find peace through an acceptance of her history, a history that includes the sexual abuse she suffered in the past and the abuse inflicted by her partner she experiences as an adult. Macdonald does not offer lesbianism as an answer to the problems faced in the novel. Instead she shows how limited definitions for gender can erupt with violent possibilities. Madeleine's sexual preferences as an adult do not bare importance to the novel except to demonstrate the difficulties she faces in surviving a year of physical and psychological trauma.

The end pages of the novel show that communion, finding and living in peace and most importantly, allowing difference, will heal the suffering caused by the painful separatist practices that have left both the Earth and its peoples metaphorically and physically bleeding. Madeleine's father "DIED OF WOUNDS," harboring the secret life he had led in Centralia, embarrassed by the cowardice that

hindered his ability to stand trial as witness for Ricky Froelich. Madeliene's brother dies in Vietnam, angry with his father for the weakness he perceived as preventing his father from engaging more actively in global politics. In the last conversation Madeleine has with her father, she asks what he did during the Cold War:

'...we beat them into space...'

*Why?*

To keep the world safe for you kids.

*Why?*

To make sure there would be a world for you to inherit.

*Why?*

'Everything we did was for your sake.'

'Maybe you should have asked us for help,' she says.

'Asked who?'

'The kids. We were born into it. The world that could be destroyed in a matter of hours. We were tougher than you.' (646-47).

Jack dies unaware of his daughter's sexual abuse and unable to provide the protection for which he had thought he was sacrificing. Still caught between British Imperial political ties, and global politics requiring soldiers to defend democracy, Jack's story illuminates the post-colonial and ecological considerations that in the end fall short of achieving any sustained balance. While he defended his country militarily, his daughter suffered physical and sexual abuse. Madeleine sacrificed for Canada too. As did many young girls:

*Claire McCarroll* MURDERED

*Madeleine McCarthy* MURDERED

*Marjorie Nolan* MURDERED

*Grace Novotny* MURDERED

*Joyce Nutt* MURDERED

*Diane Vogel* MURDERED (633)

Though not physically murdered, each of these girls experienced a loss of innocence tantamount to death. Macdonald's effort to reconcile these murders is a project of recovery based on recognizing their traumas as war stories. The final lines of text remind readers that sustaining tentative peace is effortful:

An air-raid siren is a beam of sound more terrifying than any other.

During the Second World War it was terrifying but now it is more terrifying, because it was a normal sunny day until the siren went off.[...]It says, Run to where there is no shelter.[...]And then it stops.

(713)

Peace on the Centralia air force base is a consciousness decision to resist further extremes, to resist, as Henry Froelich describes, reaching for the sun. Claire's bracelet, hidden among bits of tinfoil and bottle caps at the bottom of the crows nest is a reminder of the violent possibilities that lie in "buried" treasures. The same statement is true of the "treasures" at Peenemünde, treasures that helped built nuclear warfare and the contemporary weaponry that threaten to erupt at any moment, the siren of modernity.

The consciousness of peace is a reflection of both fear and experience: "The culture of a nation is said to be the expression of the character of the nation,"



according to the Fraser Institute. Realizing that Canadian national identity depends upon difference, depends on “bilingualism, multiculturalism, and religious and political pluralism [as] part of the complicated mix that we call Canadian society,” should quell anxieties. Canada is an “act of willingness,”<sup>26</sup> a deliberate effort to overcome the problems that arise when multiple cultures attempt to build a nation. If Canadians lack a national identity, perhaps instead they have built a national consciousness that views difference not as contemptible, but as a path toward developing wider definitions for individual identity, and consequently citizenry. Paul Gilroy reminds us that acceptance of race, nationality, and ethnicity as invariant “relieves the anxieties that arise with a loss of certainty as to who one is and where one fits” (6).

For Canadians, in fact for all nations, these invariant qualities are inherently connected to land. In his article, *The Comic Mode*, Joseph Meeker asserts that man is a part of nature “subject to all natural limitations and flaws” (167). Morality, he says, is contingent on solidarity with one’s fellow creatures. Humankind’s existence is tied to harmonious consequences, and threatened as we are now “mankind can no longer afford the wasteful and destructive luxuries of a tragic view of life” (167). According to Meeker the tragic perceives the world as a “battleground where good and evil, man and nature, truth and falsehood make war, each with the goal of destroying its polar opposite (267). Though Macdonald’s novel uses war rhetoric it falls short of meeting a tragic end, the end where the heroine death and succeeding

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<sup>26</sup> Delacourt, Susan. “Culture and National Identity”. The Fraser Institute. 2/19/2010  
<<http://oldfraser.lexi.net/publications/forum/1998/august/identity.html>>.

funeral leaves all grappling with a sense of inevitability. Despite the murders, despite her family's losses, Madeleine, her mother, and the most of the Froelich family are still alive. Madeleine's last words of the novel acquit Ricky of his false indictment, and offer tentative hope, a project of recovery, reconciliation. Meeker asks that humankind consider this alternative perspective, what he calls the comic mode, as an answer to the problem of polar opposites. How we resolve conflict without destroying the participants has to do with comedy, he argues; it is the "art of accommodation and reconciliation" (168). Madeleine must reconnect with nature, symbolically through the character of Colleen to begin mending her past. She must begin the project of reconciliation, particularly with the Froelich family, to discover harmony with nature, and, most importantly, between peoples.

If the Froelichs represent nature, then perhaps the McCarthys represent the colonizers who must find a truce with the poisons their lies scraped from their lives. Macdonald's story echoes the sentiment of Leslie Marmon Silko: "The land, the sky, and all that is within them—the landscape—includes human beings" (267). Macdonald's ultimate lesson, therefore, asks readers to find peace with the past, to use those lessons to pay compensation for the debts left too long unpaid.

## ‘AND THAT’S THE WAY IT IS’:

### REFLECTING ON ANN-MARIE MACDONALD’S WORK

Ann-Marie Macdonald’s lasting impression for some readers may not be one of optimism despite her work’s overwhelming efforts to provide an answer to the increasing limited definitions for selfhood. Shadowing anxieties, both novels end with scenes of uneasy reminiscence, a closure based not on reconciliation, but on recovery. Neither Anthony nor Madeleine tries to excuse their histories; instead, both characters begin to heal as they learn to acknowledge their familial traumas and understand how limited gender definitions contributed to the damage. According to Macdonald, their traumas, upon which nations have long established legitimacy and patriarchal order, have toxic results for all citizens. Her novels “unearth” these repressed memories, reveal hidden stories, and ultimately elevate these voices to expose the parallels between male and female experiences. These parallels rather than reifying binaries, destabilize hierarchal assumptions that place women’s stories as subordinate and ask readers to consider alternate visions, visions that include respect for the environment.

The environment is a crucial aspect in developing individual, and, subsequently, national identities. Environment, as her stories demonstrate, plays secret keeper for the project of nation building, and thus experiences a similar trauma to that of women, forced to bare the socio-political expense of modernity. As Graham Huggan’s suggests, we must consider not only the ways in which the dominant cultures have used lands and people to continue First World standards of living, but also the ways in which voice and agency have been co-opted by the

dominant culture's narrative and scholars. *Fall on Your Knees* warns readers to consider how limited definitions for gender can produce violent ends. *The Way the Crow Flies* offers a similar message, perhaps enhanced by the sense of urgency compelled by the text's veiled disappointment with society's continued inadequate notions for gender. Both texts consider how Canadian landscape, and the environment in general, reflects humankind's relationships with one another and with the nature world as a whole. Assumptions made about nature, about what is natural or unnatural, prevent society from understanding how constructed notions for gender limit possibilities for individual identity. Macdonald's writing asks that audiences look beyond dualistic conclusions toward broader definitions for femininity, masculinity, and citizenry.

In light of the globalization, Macdonald's work poses important questions about difference. Will diverse, and, at times, contentious global populations continue to homogenize cultures and peoples, or will the Canadian mosaic approach (an approach that makes acknowledges the significance of diversity) provide a model for our future? Furthermore, the Canadian literary notion of survival is particularly significant to providing an alternative vision to the unending drive of consumer capitalism. As Margaret Atwood emphasizes in her book *Survival*, settlers had no choice but to accept each day as it arrived; life was attached to survival. This notion of survival refutes the Horatio Algiers legend, a legend deeply embedded in the United States culture promising hard-working citizens monetary comfort. Like Macdonald's conclusions about gender and citizenry, the Canadian notion of survival

could provide broader definitions for success, potentially alleviating the tension of hierarchical socio-economics.

Alleviating these tensions is an important part of Macdonald's work. The importance of her texts lies not just in their indictment of patriarchal boundaries and subjections, but also in their reflection of history's complexity. A better understanding of our histories should help people to see how we can begin projects to amend the injustices that continue to plague global politics, projects inspired by Leslie Marmon Silko's definition of humanity: the land, the sky, and the landscape.<sup>27</sup> Macdonald's vision images possibilities for everyone, human, animal, and Earth. Addressing her audience at the University of Ottawa, Margaret Atwood asked: "Thus there can be no history, and no novel either, without memory of some sort; but, when it comes right down to it how reliable is memory itself—our individual memory, or our collective memory as a society?"<sup>28</sup> History, she reminds us, is built from nostalgia, guilt, revenge, and regret. These emotions remind us what we have done, what we might not have done, and what we should have done—all of them are dependent upon one another, like memory. We are not so much a product of what we remember, but what we have forgotten.<sup>29</sup> Fiction is where "individual memory and experience and collective memory and experience come together" (Atwood 1504). To understand nation and identity we must look at fiction, the space where this collusion of memory, nation and identity becomes possible. If *Fall on Your*

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<sup>27</sup> Silko 267.

<sup>28</sup> Atwood, Margaret. "AHR Forum: Histories and Historical Fictions: In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction." *American Historical Review*. (Dec 1998): 1503-1516.

<sup>29</sup> Reference to Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*. (Princeton, NJ, 1995).

*Knees* serves the didactic function of warning about the dangers of myopia, *The Way the Crow Flies* reveals the lessons lost, the unnatural conclusions in a society determined to limit ideas for gender and identity. Ultimately, Macdonald's work imagines possibilities beyond traditionally constructed dualisms, and encourages audiences to consider histories (and futures) that grant wider agency and legitimacy to citizens.

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TAMING THE WILD:  
ON WOMANHOOD, NATION AND NATURE IN THE ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S  
*FALL ON YOUR KNEES* AND *THE WAY THE CROW FLIES*

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Taming the Wild: On Womanhood, Nation and Nature in the Ann-Marie Macdonald's

*Fall on Your Knees* and *The Way the Crow Flies*

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This project evaluates the work of Canadian author and playwright Ann-Marie Macdonald in the context of links between ecocritical, feminist and post-colonial perspectives; it seeks to understand how broader definitions for gender provide an alternative to the patriarchal binaries that limit both individual and national identities. Part of the Canadian conscious is an anxiety that questions not only the way difference impacts their culture, but also how these differences speak to a lack of a homogenized national identity. This study focuses on Macdonald's novels *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) and *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) , in order to examine histories that have traditionally been excluded, stories outside of colonial, and later, national rhetoric. Macdonald exhumes these stories, elevating women's voices, in particular, to reveal the danger of limiting visions of personal identity. These identities, particularly national identities, implicitly reflect deeply imbedded, and often disregarded, relationships with our natural environment. Thus, national and individual identities are inseparable from ecological concerns. *Fall on Your Knees* uses the image and context of gardens as a means of discovery, particularly in imaging the history of colonial settlement. *The Way the Crow Flies* continues this work to explore the impact of modernity and the continued policies of categorization and, subsequently, subjugation. Modern visions for land development and industrialization inform perspectives about place and selfhood as landscapes experienced a form of colonization that revised definitions for natural and unnatural spaces. These definitions are similar to those for male and female, which have traditionally place the latter in a subjugate position. The inscription of femininity parallels that of the land, its traumas providing an important collusion between land and people. It is this paper's contention that Macdonald uses her stories to destabilize male/female binaries and, ultimately, suggest an alternative to restrictive identities.